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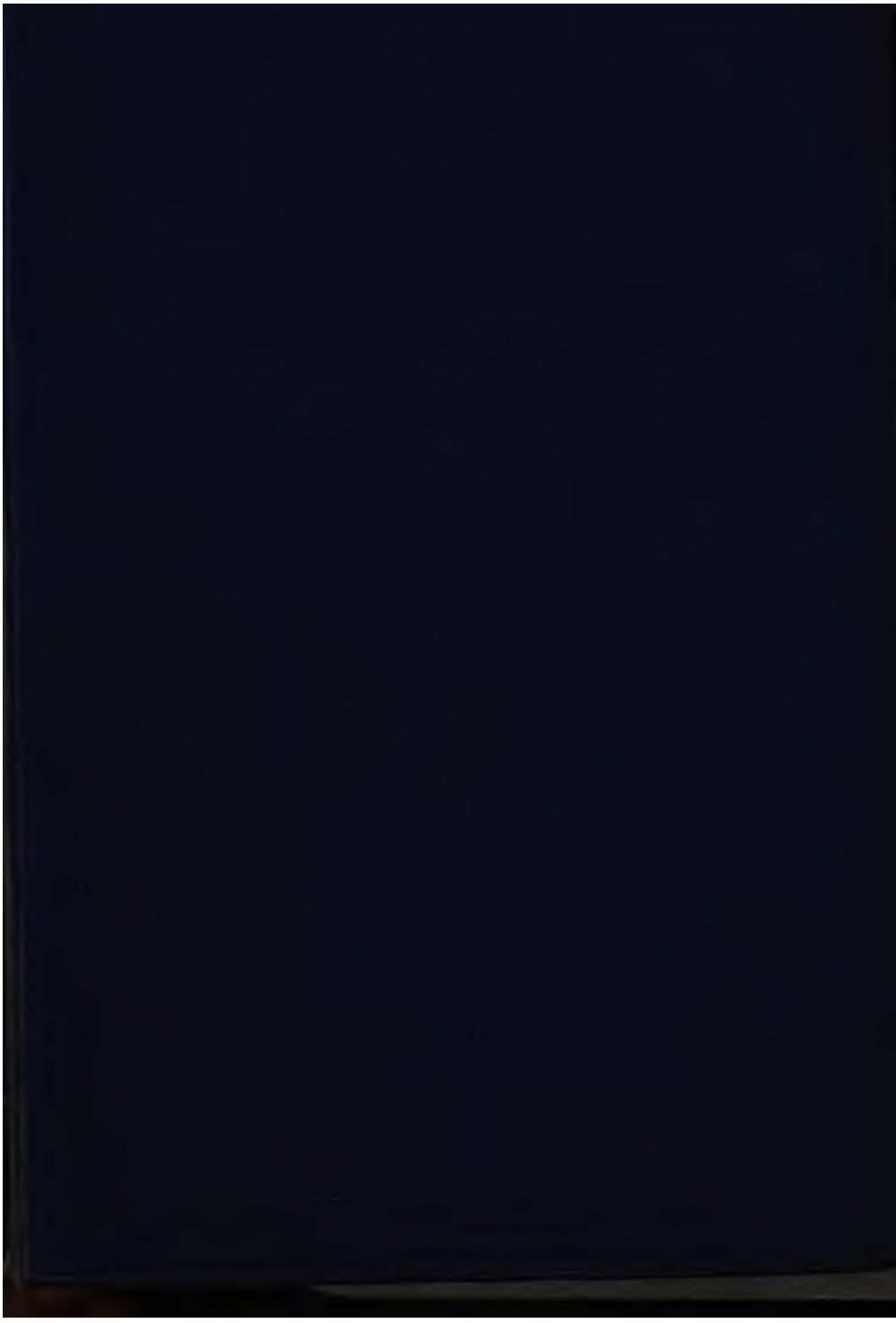

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RAVENSHOE.

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RAVENSHOE.

BY HENRY KINGSLEY,

AUTHOR OF "GEOFFRY HAMLYN."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS.

VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

THE COUP DE GRACE 1

CHAPTER II.

FLIGHT 17

CHAPTER III.

CHARLES'S RETREAT UPON LONDON 24

CHAPTER IV.

MR. SLOANE 32

CHAPTER V.

LIEUTENANT HORNBY 43

CHAPTER VI.

PAGE
SOME OF THE HUMOURS OF A LONDON MEWS 49

CHAPTER VII.

A GLIMPSE OF SOME OLD FRIENDS 60

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH FRESH MISCHIEF IS BREWED 66

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH AN ENTIRELY NEW, AND, AS WILL BE SEEN HEREAFTER, A MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTER IS INTRODUCED 80

CHAPTER X.

THE DERBY 94

CHAPTER XI.

LORD WELTER'S MÉNAGE 108

CHAPTER XII.

THE HOUSE FULL OF GHOSTS 123

CHAPTER XIII.

PAGE
CHARLES'S EXPLANATION WITH LORD WELTER 136

CHAPTER XIV.

A DINNER PARTY AMONG SOME OLD FRIENDS 143

CHAPTER XV.

CHARLES'S SECOND EXPEDITION TO ST. JOHN'S WOOD 154

CHAPTER XVI.

RAVENSHOE HALL, DURING ALL THIS 169

CHAPTER XVII.

A MEETING 186

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER MEETING 195

CHAPTER XIX.

HALF A MILLION 212

CHAPTER XX.

TO LUNCH WITH LORD ASCOT 217

CHAPTER XXI.

PAGE
LADY HAINAULT'S BLOTTING-BOOK 242

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH CUTHBERT BEGINS TO SEE THINGS IN A NEW LIGHT . 256

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SECOND COLUMN OF "THE TIMES" OF THIS DATE, WITH OTHER MATTERS 270

RAVENSHOE.

CHAPTER I.

THE COUP DE GRACE.

In the long watches of the winter night, when one has awoke from some evil dream, and lies sleepless and terrified with the solemn pall of darkness around one—on one of those deadly, still dark nights, when the window only shows a murky patch of positive gloom in contrast with the nothingness of the walls, when the howling of a tempest round chimney and roof would be welcomed as a boisterous companion—in such still dead times only, lying as in the silence of the tomb, one realizes that some day we shall lie in that bed and not think at all: that the time will come soon when we must die.

Our preachers remind us of this often enough, but we cannot realize it in a pew in broad daylight. You must wake in the middle of the night to do that, and face the thought like a man, that it will come, and come to

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ninety-nine in a hundred of us, not in a maddening clatter of musquetry as the day is won; or in carrying a line to a stranded ship, or in such like glorious times, when the soul is in mastery over the body, but in bed, by slow degrees. It is in darkness and silence only that we realize this; and then let us hope that we humbly remember that death has been conquered for us, and that in spite of our unworthiness we may defy him. And after that sometimes will come the thought, "Are there no evils worse even than death?"

I have made these few remarks (I have made very few in this story, for I want to suggest thought, not to supply it ready-made) because Charles Ravenshoe has said to me in his wild way, that he did not fear death, for he had died once already.

I did not say anything, but waited for him to go on.

"For what," he continued, "do you make out death even at the worst? A terror, then a pang, more or less severe; then a total severance of all ties on earth, an entire and permanent loss of everything one has loved. After that remorse, and useless regret, and the horrible torture of missed opportunities without number thrust continually before one. The monotonous song of the fiends, 'Too late! too late!' I have suffered all these things! I have known what very few men have known and lived—despair; but perhaps the most terrible agony for a time was the feeling of *loss of identity*—that I was not myself; that my whole existence from babyhood had been a lie. This at times, at times only,

mind you, washed away from me the only spar to which I could cling—the feeling that I was a gentleman. When the deluge came, that was the only creed I had, and I was left alone as it were on the midnight ocean, out of sight of land, swimming with failing strength."

I have made Charles speak for himself. In this I know that I am right. Now we must go on with him through the gathering darkness without flinching; in terror, perhaps, but not in despair as yet.

It never for one moment entered into his head to doubt the truth of what Father Mackworth had set up. If he had had doubts even to the last, he had none after Mackworth had looked him compassionately in the face, and said, "God judge between us if this paper be not true!" Though he distrusted Mackworth, he felt that no man, be he never so profound an actor, could have looked so and spoken so if he were not telling what he believed to be the truth. And that he and Norah were mistaken he justly felt to be an impossibility. No. He was the child of Petre Ravenshoe's bastard son by an Irish peasant girl. He who but half an hour before had been heir to the proud old name, to the noble old house, the pride of the west country, to hundreds of acres of rolling woodland, to mile beyond mile of sweeping moorland, to twenty thriving farms, deep in happy valleys, or perched high up on the side of lofty downs, was now just this—a peasant, an impostor.

The tenantry, the fishermen, the servants, they

would come to know all this. Had he died (ah! how much better than this), they would have mourned for him, but what would they say or think now? That he, the patron, the intercessor, the condescending young prince, should be the child of a waiting woman and a gamekeeper. Ah! mother, mother, God forgive you!

Adelaide: what would she think of this? He determined that he must go and see her, and tell her the whole miserable story. She was ambitious, but she loved him. Oh yes, she loved him. She could wait. There were lands beyond the sea, where a man could win a fortune in a few years, perhaps in one. There were Canada, and Australia, and India, where a man needed nothing but energy. He never would take one farthing from the Ravenshoes, save the twenty pounds he had. That was a determination nothing could alter. But why need he? There was gold to be won, and forest to be cleared, in happier lands.

Alas, poor Charles! He has never yet set foot out of England, and perhaps never will. He never thought seriously about it but this once. He never had it put before him strongly by any one. Men only emigrate from idleness, restlessness, or necessity; with the two first of these he was not troubled, and the last had not come yet. It would, perhaps, have been better for him to have gone to the backwoods or the diggings; but, as he says, the reason why he didn't was that he didn't. But at this sad crisis of his life it gave him comfort for

a little to think about; only for a little, then thought and terror came sweeping back again.

Lord Saltire? He would be told of this by others. It would be Charles's duty not to see Lord Saltire again. With his present position in society, as a servant's son, there was nothing to prevent his asking Lord Saltire to provide for him, except—what was it? Pride? Well, hardly pride. He was humble enough, God knows; but he felt as if he had gained his goodwill, as it were, by false pretences, and that duty would forbid his presuming on that goodwill any longer. And would Lord Saltire be the same to a lady's-maid's son, as he would to the heir-presumptive of Ravenshoe? No; there must be no humiliation before those stern grey eyes. Now he began to see that he loved the owner of those eyes more deeply than he had thought; and there was a gleam of pleasure in thinking that, when Lord Saltire heard of his fighting bravely unassisted with the world, he would say, "That lad was a brave fellow; a gentleman after all."

Marston? Would this terrible business, which was so new and terrible as to be as yet only half appreciated —would it make any difference to him? Perhaps it might. But, whether or no, he would humble himself there, and take from him just reproaches for idleness and missed opportunities, however bitter they might be.

And Mary? Poor little Mary! Ah! she would be safe with that good Lady Hainault. That was all. Ah, Charles! what pale little sprite was that outside your

door now, listening, dry-eyed, terrified, till you should move? Who saw you come up with your hands clutched in your hair, like a madman, an hour ago, and heard you throw yourself upon the floor, and has waited patiently ever since to see if she could comfort you, were it never so little? Ah, Charles! Foolish fellow!

Thinking, thinking—now with anger, now with tears, and now with terror—till his head was hot and his hands dry, his thoughts began to run into one channel. He saw that action was necessary, and he came to a great and noble resolution, worthy of himself. All the world was on one side, and he alone on the other. He would meet the world humbly and bravely, and conquer it. He would begin at the beginning, and find his own value in the world, and then, if he found himself worthy, would claim once more the love and respect of those who had been his friends hitherto.

How he would begin he knew not, nor cared, but it must be from the beginning. And, when he had come to this resolution, he rose up and faced the light of day once more.

There was a still figure sitting in his chair, watching him. It was William.

"William! How long have you been here?"

"Nigh on an hour. I came in just after you, and you have been lying on the hearth-rug ever since, moaning."

"An hour? Is it only an hour?"

"A short hour."

"It seemed like a year. Why, it is not dark yet. The sun still shines does it?"

He went to the window and looked out. "Spring," he said, "early spring. Fifty more of them between me and rest most likely. Do I look older, William?"

"You look pale and wild, but not older. I am mazed and stunned. I want you to look like yourself and help me, Charles. We must get away together out of this house."

"You must stay here, William; you are heir to the name and the house. You must stay here and learn your duty; I must go forth and dree my weary weird alone."

"You must go forth, I know; but I must go with you."

"William, that is impossible."

"To the world's end, Charles; I swear it by the holy Mother of God."

"Hush! You don't know what you are saying. Think of your duties."

"I know my duty. My duty is with you."

"William, look at the matter in another point of view. Will Cuthbert let you come with me?"

"I don't care. I am coming."

William was sitting where he had been in Charles's chair, and Charles was standing beside him. If William had been looking at Charles, he would have seen a troubled thoughtful expression on his face for one moment, followed by a sudden look of determina-

tion. He laid his hand on William's shoulder, and said,—

"We must talk this over again. I *must* go to Ranford and see Adelaide at once, before this news gets there from other mouths. Will you meet me at the old hotel in Covent Garden, four days from this time?"

"Why there?" said William. "Why not at Henley?"

"Why not at London, rather?" replied Charles. "I must go to London. I mean to go to London. I don't want to delay about Ranford. No; say London."

William looked in his face for a moment, and then said,—

"I'd rather travel with you. You can leave me at Wargrave, which is only just over the water from Ranford, or at Didcot, while you go on to Ranford. You must let me do that, Charles."

"We will do that, William, if you like."

"Yes, yes!" said William. "It must be so. Now you must come downstairs."

"Why?"

"To eat. Dinner is ready. I am going to tea in the servants' hall."

"Will Mary be at dinner, William?"

"Of course she will."

"Will you let me go for the last time? I should like to see the dear little face again. Only this once."

"Charles! Don't talk like that. All that this house contains is yours, and will be as long as Cuthbert and I

are here. Of course you must go. This must not get out for a long while yet—we must keep up appearances."

So Charles went down into the drawing-room. It was nearly dark; and at first he thought there was no one there, but, as he advanced towards the fireplace, he made out a tall, dark figure, and saw that it was Mackworth.

"I am come, sir," he said, "to dinner in the old room for the last time for ever."

"God forbid!" said Mackworth. "Sir, you have behaved like a brave man to-day, and I earnestly hope that, as long as I stay in this house, you will be its honoured guest. It would be simply nonsensical to make any excuses to you for the part I have taken. Even if you had not systematically opposed your interest to mine in this house, I had no other course open. You must see that."

"I believe I owe you my thanks for your forbearance so long," said Charles; "though that was for the sake of my father more than myself. Will you tell me, sir, now we are alone, how long have you known this?"

"Nearly eighteen months," said Father Mackworth promptly.

Mackworth was not an ill-natured man when he was not opposed, and, being a brave man himself, could well appreciate bravery in others. He had knowledge enough of men to know that the revelation of to-day had been a bitter blow to a passionate, sensitive man like Charles, as he could well endure and live. And he

knew that Charles distrusted him, and that all out-of-the-way expressions of condolence would be thrown away; and so, departing from his usual rule of conduct, he spoke for once in a way naturally and sincerely, and said: "I am very, very sorry. I would have done much to avoid this."

Then Mary came in and the Tiernays. Cuthbert did not come down. There was a long, dull dinner, at which Charles forced himself to eat, having a resolution before him. Mary sat scared at the head of the table, and scarcely spoke a word, and, when she rose to go into the drawing-room again, Charles followed her.

She saw that he was coming, and waited for him in the hall. When he shut the dining-room door after him she ran back, and, putting her two hands on his shoulders, said,—

"Charles! Charles! what is the matter?"

"Nothing, dear; only I have lost my fortune; I am penniless."

"Is it all gone, Charles?"

"All. You will hear how, soon. I just came out to wish my bird good-bye. I am going to London to-morrow."

"Can't you come and talk to me, Charles, a little?"

"No; not to-night. Not to-night."

"You will come and see me at Lady Hainault's in town, Charles?"

"Yes, my love; yes."

"Won't you tell me any more, Charles?"

"No more, my robin. It is good-bye. You will hear all about it soon enough."

"Good-bye."

A kiss, and he was gone up the old staircase towards his own room. When he gained the first landing, he turned and looked at her once more, standing alone in the centre of the old hall in the light of a solitary lamp. A lonely, beautiful little figure, with her arms drooping at her sides, and the quiet, dark eyes turned towards him, so lovingly! And there, in his ruin and desolation, he began to see, for the first time, what others, keener-eyed, had seen long ago. Something that might have been, but could not be now! And so, saying, "I must not see her again," he went up to his own room, and shut the door on his misery.

Once again he was seen that night. William invaded the stillroom, and got some coffee, which he carried up to him. He found him packing his portmanteau, and he asked William to see to this and to that for him, if he should sleep too long. William made him sit down and take coffee and smoke a cigar, and sat on the foot-stool at his feet, before the fire, complaining of cold. They sat an hour or two, smoking, talking of old times, of horses and dogs, and birds and trout, as lads do, till Charles said he would go to bed, and William left him.

He had hardly got to the end of the passage, when Charles called him back, and he came.

"I want to look at you again," said Charles; and he

put his two hands on William's shoulders, and looked at him again. Then he said, "Good night," and went in.

William went slowly away, and, passing to a lower story, came to the door of a room immediately over the main entrance, above the hall. This room was in the turret above the porch. It was Cuthbert's room.

He knocked softly, and there was no answer; again, and louder. A voice cried querulously, "Come in," and he opened the door.

Cuthbert was sitting before the fire with a lamp beside him and a book on his knee. He looked up and saw a groom before him, and said angrily,—

"I can give no orders to-night. I will not be disturbed to-night."

"It's me, sir," said William.

Cuthbert rose at once. "Come here, brother," he said, "and let me look at you. They told me just now that you were with our brother Charles."

"I stayed with him till he went to bed, and then I came to you."

"How is he?"

"Very quiet—too quiet."

"Is he going away?"

"He is going in the morning."

"You must go with him, William," said Cuthbert, eagerly.

"I came to tell you that I must go with him, and to ask you for some money."

"God bless you. Don't leave him. Write to me every day. Watch and see what he is inclined to settle to, and then let me know. You must get some education too. You will get it with him as well as anywhere. He must be our first care."

William said yes. He must be their first care. He had suffered a terrible wrong.

"We must get to be as brothers to one another, William," said Cuthbert. "That will come in time. We have one great object in common—Charles; and that will bring us together. The time was, when I was a fool, that I thought of being a saint, without human affections. I am wiser now. People near death see many things which are hidden in health and youth."

"Near death, Cuthbert!" said William, calling him so for the first time. "I shall live, please God, to take your children on my knee."

"It is right that you should know, brother, that in a few short years you will be master of Ravenshoe. My heart is gone. I have had an attack to-night."

"But people who are ill don't always die," said William. "Holy Virgin! you must not go and leave me all abroad in the world like a lost sheep."

"I like to hear you speak like that, William. Two days ago, I was moving heaven and earth to rob you of your just inheritance."

"I like you the better for that. Never think of that again. Does Mackworth know of your illness?"

"He knows everything."

"If Charles had been a Catholic, would he have concealed this?"

"No; I think not. I offered him ten thousand pounds to hush it up."

"I wish he had taken it. I don't want to be a great man. I should have been far happier as it was. I was half a gentleman, and had everything I wanted. Shall you oppose my marrying when Charles is settled?"

"You must marry, brother. I can never marry, and would not if I could. You must marry, certainly. The estate is a little involved; but we can soon bring it right. Till you marry, you must be contented with four hundred a year."

William laughed. "I will be content and obedient enough, I warrant you. But, when I speak of marrying, I mean marrying my present sweetheart."

Cuthbert looked up suddenly. "I did not think of that. Who is she?"

"Master Evan's daughter, Jane."

"A fisherman's daughter," said Cuthbert. "William, the mistress of Ravenshoe ought to be a lady."

"The master of Ravenshoe ought to be a gentleman," was William's reply. "And, after your death (which I don't believe in, mind you), he won't be. The master of Ravenshoe then will be only a groom; and what sort of a fine lady would he buy with his money, think you? A woman who would despise him and be ashamed of him. No, by St. George and the dragon, I will marry my old sweetheart or be single!"

"Perhaps you are right, William," said Cuthbert; "and, if you are not, I am not one who has a right to speak about it. Let us in future be honest and straightforward, and have no more miserable *esclandres*, in God's name. What sort of girl is she?"

"She is handsome enough for a duchess, and she is very quiet and shy."

"All the better. I shall offer not the slightest opposition. She had better know what is in store for her."

"She shall; and the blessing of all the holy saints be on you! I must go now. I must be up at dawn."

"Don't go yet, William. Think of the long night that is before me. Sit with me, and let me get used to your voice. Tell me about the horses, or anything—only don't leave me alone yet."

William sat down with him. They sat long and late. When at last William rose to go, Cuthbert said,—

"You will make a good landlord, William. You have been always a patient, faithful servant, and you will make a good master. Our people will get to love you better than ever they would have loved me. Cling to the old faith. It has served us well so many hundred years. It seems as if God willed that Ravenshoe should not pass from the hands of the faithful. And now, one thing more; I must see Charles before he goes. When you go to wake him in the morning, call me, and I will go with you. Good night!"

In the morning they went up together to wake him

His window was open, and the fresh spring air was blowing in. His books, his clothes, his guns, and rods, were piled about in their usual confusion. His dog was lying on the hearth-rug, and stretched himself as he came to greet them. The dog had a glove at his feet, and they wondered at it. The curtains of his bed were drawn close. Cuthbert went softly to them and drew them aside. He was not there. The bed was smooth.

"Gone! gone!" cried Cuthbert. "I half feared it: Fly, William, for God's sake, to Lord Ascot's, to Ranford; catch him there, and never leave him again. Come and get some money and begone. You may be in time. If we should lose him after all—after all!"

William needed no second bidding. In an hour he was at Stonnington. Mr. Charles Ravenshoe had arrived there at daybreak, and had gone on in the coach which started at eight. William posted to Exeter, and at eight o'clock in the evening saw Lady Ascot at Ranford. Charles Ravenshoe had been there that afternoon, but was gone. And then Lady Ascot, weeping wildly, told him such news as made him break from the room with an oath, and dash through the scared servants in the hall and out into the darkness, to try to overtake the carriage he had discharged, and reach London.

The morning before, Adelaide had eloped with Lord Welter.

CHAPTER II.

FLIGHT.

WHEN William left Charles in his room at Ravenshoe, the latter sat down in his chair and began thinking.

The smart of the blow, which had fallen so heavily at first, had become less painful. He knew by intuition that it would be worse on the morrow, and on many morrows; but at present it was alleviated. He began to dread sleeping, for fear of the waking.

He dreaded the night and dreams; and, more than all, the morrow and the departure. He felt that he ought to see Cuthbert again, and he dreaded that. He dreaded the servants seeing him go. He had a horror of parting from all he had known so long, formally. It was natural. It would be so much pain to all concerned; were it not better avoided? He thought of all these things, and tried to persuade himself that these were the reasons which made him do what he had as good as determined to do an hour or two before, what he had in his mind when he called William back in the corridor—to go away alone, and hide and mope like a wounded stag for a little time.

It was his instinct to do so. Perhaps it would have been the best thing for him. At all events, he deter-

mined on it, and packed up a portmanteau and carpet-bag, and then sat down again, waiting.

"Yes," he said to himself, "it will be better to do this. I must get away from William, poor lad. He must not follow my fortunes, for many reasons."

His dog had been watching him, looking, with his bright loving eyes, first at him and then at his baggage, wondering what journey they were going on now. When Charles had done packing, and had sat down again in his chair before the fire, the dog leapt up in his lap unbidden, and laid his head upon his breast.

"Grip, Grip!" said Charles, "I am going away to leave you for ever, Grip. Dogs don't live so long as men, my boy; you will be quietly under the turf and at rest, when I shall have forty long years more to go through with."

The dog wagged his tail, and pawed his waistcoat. He wanted some biscuit. Charles got him some, and then went on talking.

"I am going to London, old dog. I am going to see what the world is like. I sha'n't come back before you are dead, Grip, I expect. I have got to win money and a name for the sake of one who is worth winning it for. Very likely I shall go abroad, to the land where the stuff comes from they make sovereigns of, and try my luck at getting some of the yellow rubbish. And she will wait in the old house at Ranford."

He paused here. The thought came upon him, "Would it not be more honourable to absolve Adelaide

from her engagement? Was he acting generously in demanding of her to waste the best part of her life in waiting till a ruined man had won fortune and means?"

The answer came. "She loves me. If I can wait why not she?"

"I have wronged her by such a thought, Grip. Haven't I, my boy?"—and so on. I needn't continue telling you the nonsense Charles talked to his dog. Men will talk nonsense to their dogs and friends when they are in love; and such nonsense is but poor reading at any time. To us who know what had happened, and how worthless and false Adelaide was, it would be merely painful and humiliating to hear any more of it. I only gave you so much to show you how completely Charles was in the dark, poor fool, with regard to Adelaide's character, and to render less surprising the folly of his behaviour after he heard the news at Ranford.

Charles judged every one by his own standard. She had told him that she loved him; and perhaps she did, for a time. He believed her. As for vanity, selfishness, fickleness, calculation, coming in and conquering love, he knew it was impossible in his own case, and so he conceived it impossible in hers. I think I have been very careful to impress on you that Charles was not wise. At all events, if I have softened matters so far hitherto as to leave you in doubt, his actions, which we shall have to chronicle immediately, will leave not the slightest doubt of it. I love the man. I love his very faults in a way. He is a reality to me, though I

may not have the art to make him so to you. His mad, impulsive way of forming a resolution, and his honourable obstinacy in sticking to that resolution afterwards, even to the death, are very great faults; but they are, more or less, the faults of many men who have made a very great figure in the world, or I have read history wrong. Men with Charles Ravenshoe's character, and power of patience and application superadded, turn out very brilliant characters for the most part. Charles had not been drilled into habits of application early enough. Densil's unthinking indulgence had done him much harm, and he was just the sort of boy to be spoilt at school—a favourite among the masters and the boys; always just up to his work, and no more. It is possible that Eton in one way, or Rugby in another, might have done for him what Shrewsbury certainly did not. At Eton, thrown at once into a great, free republic, he might have been forced to fight his way up to his proper place, which, I believe, would not have been a low one. At Rugby he would have had his place to win all the same; but to help him he would have had all the traditionary school policy which a great man has left behind him as an immortal legacy. It was not to be. He was sent to a good and manly school enough, but one where there was for him too little of competition. Shrewsbury is, in most respects, the third of the *old* schools in England; but it was, unluckily, not the school for him. He was too great a man there.

At Oxford, too, he hardly had a fair chance. Lord

Welter was there before him, and had got just such a set about him as one would expect from that young gentleman's character and bringing up. These men were Charles's first and only acquaintances at the University. What chance was there among them for correcting and disciplining himself? None. The wonder was that he came out from among them without being greatly deteriorated. The only friend Charles ever had who could guide him on the way to being a man was John Marston. But John Marston, to say the truth, was sometimes too hard and didactic, and very often roused Charles's obstinacy through want of tact. Marston loved Charles, and thought him better than the ninety and nine who need no repentance; but it did not fall to Marston's lot to make a man of Charles. Some one took that in hand who never fails.

This is the place for my poor apology for Charles's folly. If I had inserted it before, you would not have attended to it, or would have forgotten it. If I have done my work right, it is merely a statement of the very conclusion you must have come to. In the humiliating scenes which are to follow, I only beg you to remember that Charles Horton was Charles Ravenshoe once; and that, while he was a gentleman, the people loved him well.

Once, about twelve o'clock, he left his room and passed through the house to see if all was quiet. He heard the grooms and footmen talking in the servants' hall. He stole back again to his room and sat before the fire.

In half an hour he rose again, and put his portmanteau and carpet-bag outside his room door. Then he took his hat, and rose to go.

One more look round the old room! The last for ever! The present overmastered the past, and he looked round almost without recognition. I doubt whether at great crises men have much time for recollecting old associations. I looked once into a room, which had been my home, ever since I was six years old, for five-and-twenty-years, knowing I should never see it again. But it was to see that I had left nothing behind me. The coach was at the door, and they were calling for me. Now I could draw you a correct map of all the blotches and cracks in the ceiling, as I used to see them when I lay in bed of a morning. But, then, I only shut the door and ran down the passage, without even saying "good-bye, old bedroom." Charles Ravenshoe looked round the room thoughtlessly, and then blew out the candle, went out, and shut the door.

The dog whined and scratched to come after him; so he went back again. The old room bathed in a flood of moonlight, and, seen through the open window, the busy chafing sea, calling to him to hasten.

He took a glove from the table, and, laying it on the hearth-rug, told the dog to mind it. The dog looked wistfully at him and lay down. The next moment he was outside the door again.

Through long moonlit corridors, down the moonlit hall, through dark passages, which led among the sleep-

ing household, to the door in the priest's tower. The household slept, old men and young men, maids and matrons, quietly, and dreamt of this and of that. And he, who was yesterday nigh master of all, passed out from among them, and stood alone in the world, outside the dark old house, which he had called his home.

Then he felt the deed was done. Was it only the night-wind from the north that laid such a chill hand on his heart? Busy waves upon the shore talking eternally,—"We have come in from the Atlantic, bearing messages; we have come over foundered ships and the bones of drowned sailors, and we tell our messages and die upon the shore."

Shadows that came sweeping from the sea, over lawn and flower-bed, and wrapped the old mansion like a pall for one moment, and then left it shining again in the moonlight, clear, pitiless. Within, warm rooms, warm beds, and the bated breath of sleepers, lying secure in the lap of wealth and order. Without, hard, cold stone. The great world around awaiting to devour one more atom. The bright unsympathizing stars, and the sea, babbling of the men it had rolled over, whose names should never be known.

Now the park, with herds of ghostly startled deer, and the sweet scent of growing fern; then the rush of the brook, the bridge, and the vista of woodland above; and then the sleeping village.

CHAPTER III.

CHARLES'S RETREAT UPON LONDON.

PASSING out of the park, Charles set down his burden at the door of a small farm-house at the further end of the village, and knocked. For some time he stood waiting for an answer, and heard no sound save the cows and horses moving about in the warm straw-yard. The beasts were in their home. No terrible new morrow for them. He was without in the street; his home irrevocable miles behind him; still not a thought of flinching or turning back. He knocked again.

The door was unbarred. An old man looked out, and recognised him with wild astonishment.

"Mr. Charles! Good lord-a-mercy! My dear tender heart, what be doing out at this time a-night? With his portmantle, too, and his carpet bag! Come in, my dear soul, come in. An, so pale and wild! Why, you'm overlooked, Master Charles."

"No, Master Lee, I ain't overlooked. At least not that I know of——"

The old man shook his head, and reserved his opinion.

"——But I want your gig to go into Stonnington."

"To-night?"

"Ay, to-night. The coach goes at eight in the morning; I want to be there before that."

"Why do'ee start so soon? They'll be all abed in the Chichester Arms."

"I know. I shall get into the stable. I don't know where I shall get. I must go. There is trouble at the Hall."

"Ay! ay! I thought as much, and you'm going away into the world?"

"Yes."

The old man said, "Ay! ay!" again, and turned to go upstairs. Then he held his candle over his head, and looked at Charles; and then went upstairs muttering to himself.

Presently was aroused from sleep a young Devonshire giant, half Hercules, half Antinoüs, who lumbered down the stairs, and into the room, and made his obeisance to Charles with an air of wonder in his great sleepy black eyes, and departed to get the gig.

Of course his first point was Ranford. He got there in the afternoon. He had in his mind at this time, he thinks (for he does not remember it all very distinctly), the idea of going to Australia. He had an idea, too, of being eminently practical and business-like; and so he did a thing which may appear to be trifling, but which was important—one cannot say how much so. He asked for Lord Ascot instead of Lady Ascot.

Lord Ascot was in the library. Charles was shown in to him. He was sitting before the fire, reading a

novel. He looked very worn and anxious, and jumped up nervously when Charles was announced. He dropped his book on the floor, and came forward to him, holding out his right hand.

"Charles," he said, "you will forgive me any participation in this. I swear to you——"

Charles thought that by some means the news of what had happened at Ravenshoe had come before him, and that Lord Ascot knew all about Father Mackworth's discovery. Lord Ascot was thinking about Adelaide's flight; so they were at cross purposes.

"Dear Lord Ascot," said Charles, "how could I think of blaming you, my kind old friend?"

"It is devilish gentlemanly of you to speak so, Charles," said Lord Ascot. "I am worn to death about that horse, Haphazard, and other things; and this has finished me. I have been reading a novel to distract my mind. I must win the Derby, you know; by Gad, I must."

"Whom have you got, Lord Ascot?"

"Wells."

"You couldn't do better, I suppose?"

"I suppose not. You don't know—I'd rather not talk any more about it, Charles."

"Lord Ascot, this is, as you may well guess, the last time I shall ever see you. I want you to do me a favour."

"I will do it, my dear Charles, with the greatest pleasure. Any reparation——"

"Hush, my lord! I only want a certificate. Will you read this which I have written in pencil, and, if you conscientiously can, copy in your own hand, and sign it. Also, if I send to you a reference, will you confirm it?"

Lord Ascot read what Charles had written, and said—

"Yes, certainly. You are going to change your name, then?"

"I must bear that name, now; I am going abroad."

Lord Ascot wrote—

"The undermentioned Charles Horton I have known ever since he was a boy. His character is beyond praise in every way. He is a singularly bold and dexterous rider, and is thoroughly up to the management of horses.

"ASCOT."

"You have improved upon my text, Lord Ascot," said Charles. "It is like your kindheartedness. The mouse may offer to help the lion, my lord; and, although the lion may know how little likely it is that he should require help, yet he may take it as a sign of good will on the part of the poor mouse. Now, good-bye, my lord; I must see Lady Ascot, and then be off."

Lord Ascot wished him kindly good-bye, and took up his novel again. Charles went alone up to Lady Ascot's room.

He knocked at the door, and received no answer; so he went in. Lady Ascot was there, although she had not answered him. She was sitting upright by the fire,

staring at the door, with her hands folded on her lap. A fine brave-looking old lady at all times, but just now, Charles thought, with that sweet look of pity showing itself principally about the corners of the gentle old mouth, more noble-looking than ever!

"May I come in, Lady Ascot?" said Charles.

"My dearest own boy! You must come in and sit down. You must be very quiet over it. Try not to make a scene, my dear. I am not strong enough. It has shaken me so terribly. I heard you had come, and were with Ascot. And I have been trembling in every limb. Not from terror so much of you in your anger, as because my conscience is not clear. I may have hidden things from you, Charles, which you ought to have known." And Lady Ascot began crying silently.

Charles felt the blood going from his cheeks to his heart. His interview with Lord Ascot had made him suspect something further was wrong than what he knew of, and his suspicions were getting stronger every moment. He sat down quite quietly, looking at Lady Ascot, and spoke not one word. Lady Ascot wiping her eyes, went on; and Charles's heart began to beat with a dull heavy pulsation, like the feet of those who carry a coffin.

"I ought to have told you what was going on between them before she went to old Lady Hainault. I ought to have told you of what went on before Lord Hainault was married. I can never forgive myself, Charles. You may upbraid me, and I will sit here and make not one

excuse. But I must say that I never for one moment thought that she was anything more than light-headed. I,—oh Lord! I never dreamt it would have come to this."

"Are you speaking of Adelaide, Lady Ascot?" said Charles.

"Of course I am," she said, almost peevishly. "If I had ever——"

"Lady Ascot," said Charles, quietly, "you are evidently speaking of something of which I have not heard. What has Adelaide done?"

The old lady clasped her hands above her head. "Oh, weary, weary day! And I thought that he had heard it all, and that the blow was broken. The cowards! they have left it to a poor old woman to tell him at last."

"Dear Lady Ascot, you evidently have not heard of what a terrible fate has befallen me. I am a ruined man, and I am very patient. I had one hope left in the world, and I fear that you are going to cut it away from me. I am very quiet, and will make no scene; only tell me what has happened."

"Adelaide!—be proud, Charles, be angry, furious—you Ravenshoes can!—be a man, but don't look like that. Adelaide, dead to honour and good fame, has gone off with Welter!"

Charles walked towards the door.

"That is enough. Please let me go. I can't stand any more at present. You have been very kind to me and to her, and I thank you and bless you for it. The

son of a bastard blesses you for it. Let me go—let me go."

Lady Ascot had stepped actively to the door, and had laid one hand on the door, and one on his breast. "You shall not go," she said, "till you have told me what you mean."

"How? I cannot stand any more at present."

"What do you mean by being the son of a bastard?"

"I am the son of James, Mr. Ravenshoe's keeper. He was the illegitimate son of Mr. Petre Ravenshoe."

"Who told you this?" said Lady Ascot.

"Cuthbert."

"How did he know it?"

Charles told her all.

"So the priest has found that out, eh?" said Lady Ascot. "It seems true;" and, as she said so, she moved back from the door. "Go to your old bedroom, Charles. It will always be ready for you while this house is a house; and come down to me presently. Where is Lord Saltire?"

"At Lord Segur's."

Charles went out of the room, and out of the house, and was seen no more. Lady Ascot sat down by the fire again.

"The one blow has softened the other," she said. "I will never keep another secret after this. It was for Alicia's sake and for Petre's that I did it, and now see what has become of it. I shall send for Lord Saltire. The boy must have his rights, and shall, too."

So the brave old woman sat down and wrote to Lord Saltire. We shall see what she wrote to him in the proper place. Not now. She sat calmly and methodically writing, with her kind old face wreathing into a smile as she went on. And Charles, the madman, left the house, and posted off to London, only intent on seeking to lose himself among the sordid crowd, so that no man he had ever called a friend should set eyes on him again.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. SLOANE.

CHARLES RAVENSHOE had committed suicide—committed suicide as deliberately as any maddened wretch had done that day in all the wide miserable world. He knew it well, and was determined to go on with it. He had not hung himself, or drowned himself, but he had committed deliberate suicide, and he knew—knew well—that his obstinacy would carry him through to the end.

What is suicide nine cases out of ten? Any one can tell you. It is the act of a mad, proud coward, who flies, by his own deed, not from humiliation or disgrace, but, as he fancies, from feeling the consequences of them—who flies to unknown, doubtful evils, sooner than bear positive, present, undoubted ones. All this had Charles done, buoying him up with this excuse and that excuse, and fancying that he was behaving, the cur, like Bayard, or Lieutenant Willoughby—a greater than Bayard—all the time.

The above is Charles's idea of the matter himself, put in the third person for form's sake. I don't agree with all he says about himself. I don't deny that he did

a very foolish thing, but I incline to believe that there was something noble and self-reliant in his doing it. Think a moment. He had only two courses open to him—the one (I put it coarsely) to eat humble pie, to go back to Cuthbert and Mackworth and accept their offers; the other to do as he had done—to go alone into the world, and stand by himself. He did the latter, as we shall see. He could not face Ravenshoe, or any connected with it, again. It had been proved that he was an unwilling impostor, of base, low blood, and his sister—ah, one more pang, poor heart—his sister Ellen, what was she?

Little doubt—little doubt! Better for both of them if they had never been born! He was going to London, and, perhaps, might meet her there! All the vice and misery of the country got thrown into that cesspool. When anything had got too foul for the pure country air, men said, Away with it; throw it into the great dunghill, and let it rot there. Was he not going there himself? It was fit she should be there before him! They would meet for certain!

How would they meet? Would she be in silks and satins, or in rags? flaunting in her carriage, or shivering in an archway? What matter? was not shame the heritage of the "lower orders?" The pleasures of the rich must be ministered to by the "lower orders," or what was the use of money or rank? He was one of the lower orders now. He must learn his lesson; learn to cringe and whine like the rest of them. It would be

hard, but it must be learnt. The dogs rose against it sometimes, but it never paid.

The devil was pretty busy with poor Charles in his despair, you see. This was all he had left after three and twenty years of careless idleness and luxury. His creed had been, "I am a Ravenshoe," and lo! one morning, he was a Ravenshoe no longer. A poor crow, that had been fancying himself an eagle. A crow! "by heavens," he thought "he was not even that." A non-entity, turned into the world to find his own value! What were honour, honesty, virtue to him? Why, nothing—words! He must truckle and pander for his living. Why not go back and truckle to Father Mackworth? There was time yet.

No!

Why not? Was it pride only? We have no right to say what it was. If it was only pride, it was better than nothing. Better to have that straw only to cling to, than to be all alone in the great sea with nothing. We have seen that he has done nothing good, with circumstances all in his favour; let us see if he can in any way hold his own, with circumstances all against him.

"America?" he thought once. "They are all gentlemen there. If I could only find her, and tear her jewels off, we would go there together. But she must be found—she must be found. I will never leave England till she goes with me. We shall be brought together. We shall see one another. I love her as I never loved her before. What a sweet, gentle little love she was! My

darling! And, when I have kissed her, I never dreamed she was my sister. My pretty love! Ellen, Ellen, I am coming to you. Where are you, my love?"

He was alone, in a railway carriage, leaning out to catch the fresh wind, as he said this. He said it once again, this time aloud. "Where are you, my sister?"

Where was she? Could he have only seen! *We* may be allowed to see, though *he* could not. Come forward into the great Babylon with me, while he is speeding on towards it; we will rejoin him in an instant.

In a small luxuriously furnished hall, there stands a beautiful woman, dressed modestly in the garb of a servant. She is standing with her arms folded, and a cold, stern, curious look on her face. She is looking towards the hall-door, which is held open by a footman. She is waiting for some one who is coming in; and two travellers enter, a man and a woman. She goes up to the woman, and says, quietly, "I bid you welcome, madam." Who are these people? Is that waiting-woman Ellen? and these travellers, are they Lord Welter and Adelaide? Let us get back to poor Charles; better be with him than here!

We must follow him closely. We must see why, in his despair, he took the extraordinary resolution that he did. Not that I shall take any particular pains to follow the exact process of his mind in arriving at his determination. If the story has hitherto been told well it will appear nothing extraordinary, and, if otherwise,

an intelligent reader would very soon detect any attempt at bolstering up ill-told facts by elaborate, soul-analyzing theories.

He could have wished the train would have run on for ever; but he was aroused by the lights growing thicker and more brilliant, and he felt that they were nearing London, and that the time for action was come.

The great plunge was taken, and he was alone in the cold street—alone, save for the man who carried his baggage. He stood for a moment or so, confused with the rush of carriages of all sorts which were taking the people from the train, till he was aroused by the man asking him where he was to go to.

Charles said, without thinking, "The Warwick Hotel," and thither they went. For a moment he regretted that he had said so, but the next moment he said, aloud, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!"

The man turned round, and begged his pardon. Charles did not answer him; and the man went on, wondering what sort of young gentleman he had got hold of.

The good landlord was glad to see him. Would he have dinner?—a bit of fish and a lamb chop, for instance? Then it suddenly struck Charles that he was hungry—ravenous. He laughed aloud at the idea; and the landlord laughed too, and rubbed his hands. Should it be whiting or smelts now? he asked.

"Anything," said Charles, "so long as you feed me

quick. And give me wine, will you, of some sort; I want to drink. Give me sherry, will you? And I say, let me taste some now, and then I can see if I like it. I am very particular about my wine, you must know."

In a few minutes a waiter brought in a glass of wine, and waited to know how Charles liked it. He told the man he could go, and he would tell him at dinner-time. When the man was gone, he looked at the wine with a smile. Then he took it up, and poured it into the coal-scuttle.

"Not yet," he said, "not yet! I'll try something else before I try to drink my troubles away." And then he plunged into the *Times*.

He had no sooner convinced himself that Lord Aberdeen was tampering with the honour of the country by not declaring war, than he found himself profoundly considering what had caused that great statesman to elope with Adelaide, and whether, in case of a Russian war, Lady Ascot would possibly convict Father Mackworth of having caused it. Then Lady Ascot came into the room with a large bottle of medicine and a Testament, announcing that she was going to attend a sick gun-boat. And then, just as he began to see that he was getting sleepy, to sleep he went, fast as a top.

Half an hour's sleep restored him, and dinner made things look different. "After all," he said, as he sipped his wine, "here is only the world on the one side and I

on the other. I am utterly reckless, and can sink no further. I will get all the pleasure out of life that I can, honestly; for I am an honest man still, and mean to be. I love you, Madame Adelaide, and you have used me worse than a hound, and made me desperate. If he marries you, I will come forward some day, and disgrace you. If you had only waited till you knew everything, I could have forgiven you. I'll get a place as a footman, and talk about you in the servants' hall. All London shall know you were engaged to me."

"Poor dear, pretty Adelaide; as if I would ever hurt a hair of your head, my sweet love! Silly——"

The landlord came in. There was most excellent company in the smoking-room. Would he condescend to join them?

Company and tobacco! Charles would certainly join them; so he had his wine carried in.

There was a fat gentleman, with a snub nose, who was a Conservative. There was a tall gentleman, with a long nose, who was Liberal. There was a short gentleman, with no particular kind of nose, who was Radical. There was a handsome gentleman, with big whiskers, who was commercial; and there was a gentleman with bandy legs, who was horsy.

I strongly object to using a slang adjective, if any other can be got to supply its place; but by doing so sometimes one avoids a periphrasis, and does not spoil one's period. Thus, I know of no predicate for a gentleman with a particular sort of hair, complexion,

dress, whiskers, and legs, except the one I have used above, and so it must stand.

As Providence would have it, Charles sat down between the landlord and the horsy man, away from the others. He smoked his cigar, and listened to the conversation.

The Conservative gentleman coalesced with the Liberal gentleman on the subject of Lord Aberdeen's having sold the country to the Russians; the Radical gentleman also came over to them on that subject; and for a time the opposition seemed to hold an overwhelming majority, and to be merely allowing Aberdeen's Government to hold place longer, that they might commit themselves deeper. In fact, things seemed to be going all one way, as is often the case in coalition ministries just before a grand crash, when the Radical gentleman caused a violent split in the cabinet, by saying that the whole complication had been brought about by the machinations of the aristocracy—which assertion caused the Conservative gentleman to retort in unmeasured language; and then the Liberal gentleman, trying to trim, found himself distrusted and despised by both parties. Charles listened to them, amused for the time to hear them quoting, quite unconsciously, whole sentences out of their respective leading papers, and then was distracted by the horsy man saying to him—

"Darn politics. What horse will win the Derby, sir?"

"Haphazard," said Charles, promptly. This, please to remember, was Lord Ascot's horse, which we have seen before.

The landlord immediately drew closer up.

The horsy man looked at Charles, and said, "H'm; and what has made my lord scratch him for the Two Thousand, sir?"

And so on. We have something to do with Haphazard's winning the Derby, as we shall see; and we have still more to do with the result of Charles's conversation with the "horsy man." But we have certainly nothing to do with a wordy discussion about the various horses which stood well for the great race (wicked, lovely darlings, how many souls of heroes have they sent to Hades!), and so we will spare the reader. The conclusion of their conversation was the only important part of it.

Charles said to the horsy man on the stairs, "Now you know everything. I am penniless, friendless, and nameless. Can you put me in the way of earning my living honestly?"

And he said, "I can, and I will. This gentleman is a fast man, but he is rich. You'll have your own way. Maybe, you'll see some queer things, but what odds?"

"None to me," said Charles; "I can always leave him."

"And go back to your friends, like a wise young gentleman, eh?" said the other, kindly.

"I am not a gentleman," said Charles. "I told you

so before. I am a gamekeeper's son; I swear to you I am. I have been petted and pampered till I look like one, but I am not."

"You are a deuced good imitation," said the other. "Good night; come to me at nine, mind."

At this time, Lady Ascot had despatched her letter to Lord Saltire, and had asked for Charles. The groom of the chambers said that Mr. Ravenshoe had left the house immediately after his interview with her ladyship, three hours before.

She started up. "Gone!—Whither?"

"To Twyford, my lady."

"Send after him, you idiot! Send the grooms after him on all my lord's horses. Send a lad on Haphazard, and let him race the train to London. Send the police! He has stolen my purse, with ten thousand gold guineas in it!—I swear he has. Have him bound hand and foot, and bring him back, on your life. If you stay there I will kill you!"

The violent old animal nature, dammed up so long by creeds and formulas, had broken out at last. The decorous Lady Ascot was transformed in one instant into a terrible, grey-headed, magnificent old Alecto, hurling her awful words abroad in a sharp, snarling voice, that made the hair of him that heard it to creep upon his head. The man fled, and shut Lady Ascot in alone.

She walked across the room, and beat her withered

old hands against the wall. "Oh, miserable, wicked old woman!" she cried aloud. "How surely have your sins found you out! After concealing a crime for so many years, to find the judgment fall on such an innocent and beloved head! Alicia, Alicia, I did this for your sake. Charles, Charles, come back to the old woman before she dies, and tell her you forgive her."

CHAPTER V.

LIEUTENANT HORNBY.

CHARLES had always been passionately fond of horses, and of riding. He was a consummate horseman, and was so perfectly accomplished in everything relating to horses, that I really believe that in time he might actually have risen to the dizzy height of being stud-groom to a great gentleman or nobleman. He had been brought up in a great horse-riding house, and had actually gained so much experience, and had so much to say on matters of this kind; that once, at Oxford, a promising young nobleman cast, so to speak, an adverse opinion of Charles's into George Simmonds's own face. Mr. Simmonds looked round on the offender mildly and compassionately, and said, "If any undergraduate *could* know, my lord, that undergraduate's name would be Ravenshoe of Paul's. But he is young, my lord. And, in consequence, ignorant." His lordship didn't say anything after that.

I have kept this fact in the background rather, hitherto, because it has not been of any great consequence. It becomes of some consequence now, for the first time. I enlarged a little on Charles being a rowing man, because rowing and training had, for good or for

evil, a certain effect on his character. (Whether for good or for evil, you must determine for yourselves.) And I now mention the fact of his being a consummate horseman, because a considerable part of the incidents which follow arise from the fact.

Don't think for one moment that you are going to be bored by stable talk. You will have simply none of it. It only amounts to this—that Charles, being fond of horses, took up with a certain line of life, and in that line of life met with certain adventures which have made his history worth relating.

When he met the "horsy" man next morning, he was not dressed like a gentleman. In his store he had some old clothes, which he used to wear at Ravenshoe, in the merry old days when he would be up with daylight to exercise the horses on the moor—cord trousers, and so on, which, being now old and worn, made him look uncommonly like a groom out of place. And what contributed to the delusion was, that for the first time in his life he wore no shirt collar, but allowed his blue-spotted neckcloth to border on his honest red face, without one single quarter of an inch of linen. And, if it ever pleases your lordship's noble excellence to look like a blackguard for any reason, allow me to recommend you to wear a dark necktie and no collar. Your success will be beyond your utmost hopes.

Charles met his new friend in the bar, and touched his hat to him. His friend laughed, and said, that would do, but asked how long he thought he could keep that

sort of thing going. Charles said, as long as was necessary; and they went out together.

They walked as far as a street leading out of one of the largest and best squares (I mean B—lg—e Sq—e, but I don't like to write it at full length), and stopped at the door of a handsome shop. Charles knew enough of London to surmise that the first floor was let to a man of some wealth; and he was right.

The door was opened, and his friend was shown up stairs, while he was told to wait in the hall. Now Charles began to perceive, with considerable amusement, that he was acting a part—that he was playing, so to speak, at being something other than what he really was, and that he was perhaps overdoing it. In this house, which yesterday he would have entered as an equal, he was now playing at being a servant. It was immensely amusing. He wiped his shoes very clean, and sat down on a bench in the hall, with his hat between his knees, as he had seen grooms do. It is no use wondering; one never finds out anything by that. But I do wonder, nevertheless, whether Charles, had he only known in what relation the master of that house stood to himself, would or would not have set the house on fire, or cut its owner's throat. When he did find out, he did neither the one thing nor the other; but he had been a good deal tamed by that time.

Presently a servant came down, and, eyeing Charles curiously as a prospective fellow-servant, told him civilly to walk up stairs.

He went up. The room was one of a handsome suite, and overlooked the street. Charles saw at a glance that it was the room of a great dandy. A dandy, if not of the first water, most assuredly high up in the second. Two things only jarred on his eye in his hurried glance round the room. There was too much bric-a-brac, and too many flowers. "I wonder if he is a gentleman," thought Charles. His friend of the night before was standing in a respectful attitude, leaning on the back of a chair, and Charles looked round for the master of the house, eagerly. He had to cast his eyes downward to see him, for he was lying back on an easy chair, half hidden by the breakfast table.

There he was—Charles's master: the man who was going to buy him. Charles cast one intensely eager glance at him, and was satisfied. "He will do at a pinch," said he to himself.

There were a great many handsome and splendid things in that room, but the owner of them was by far the handsomest and most splendid thing there.

He was a young man, with very pale and delicate features, and a singularly amiable cast of face, who wore a moustache, with the long whiskers which were just then coming into fashion; and he was dressed in a splendid uniform of blue, gold, and scarlet, for he had been on duty that morning, and had just come in. His sabre was cast upon the floor before him, and his shako was on the table. As Charles looked at him, he passed his hand over his hair. There was one ring on it, but

such a ring! "That's a high-bred hand enough," said Charles to himself. "And he hasn't got too much jewellery on him. I wonder who the deuce he is?"

"This is the young man, sir," said Charles's new friend.

Lieutenant Hornby was looking at Charles, and, after a pause, said—

"I take him on your recommendation, Sloane. I have no doubt he will do. He seems a good fellow. You are a good fellow, ain't you?" he continued, addressing Charles personally, with that happy graceful insolence which is the peculiar property of prosperous and entirely amiable young men, and which charms one in spite of oneself.

Charles replied, "I am quarrelsome sometimes among my equals, but I am always good-tempered among horses."

"That will do very well. You may punch the other two lads' heads as much as you like. They don't mind me; perhaps they may you. You will be over them. You will have the management of everything. You will have unlimited opportunities of robbing and plundering me, with an entire absence of all chance of detection. But you won't do it. It isn't your line, I saw at once. Let me look at your hand."

Charles gave him the great ribbed paw which served him in that capacity. And Hornby said—

"Ha! Gentleman's hand. No business of mine. Don't wear that ring, will you? A groom mustn't wear such rings as that. Any character?"

Charles showed him the letter Lord Ascot had written.

"Lord Ascot, eh? I know Lord Welter, slightly."

"The deuce you do," thought Charles.

"Were you in Lord Ascot's stables?"

"No, sir. I am the son of Squire Ravenshoe's gamekeeper. The Ravenshoes and my Lord Ascot's family are connected by marriage. Ravenshoe is in the west country, sir. Lord Ascot knows me by repute, sir, and has a good opinion of me."

"It is perfectly satisfactory. Sloane, will you put him in the way of his duties. Make the other lads understand that he is master, will you? You may go."

CHAPTER VI.

SOME OF THE HUMOURS OF A LONDON MEWS.

So pursuing the course of our story, we have brought ourselves to the present extraordinary position. That Charles Ravenshoe, of Ravenshoe, in the county Devonshire, Esquire, and sometime of St. Paul's College, Oxford, had hired himself out as groom to Lieutenant Hornby, of the 140th Hussars, and that also the above-named Charles Ravenshoe was not, and never had been, Charles Ravenshoe at all, but somebody else all the time, to wit, Charles Horton, a gamekeeper's son, if indeed he was even this, having been christened under a false name.

The situation is so extraordinary and so sad, that having taken the tragical view of it in the previous chapter, we must of necessity begin to look on the brighter side of it now. And this is the better art, because it is exactly what Charles began to do himself. One blow succeeded the other so rapidly, the utter bouleversement of all that he cared about in the world. Father, friends, position, mistress, all lost in one day, had brought on a kind of light-hearted desperation, which had the effect of making him seek company, and talk boisterously and loud all day. It was not unnatural in so young and vigorous a man. But if he

woke in the night, there was the cold claw grasping his heart. Well, I said, we would have none of this at present, and we won't.

Patient old earth, intent only on doing her duty in her set courses, and unmindful of the mites which had been set to make love or war on her bosom, and the least of whom was worth her whole well-organized mass, had rolled on, and on, until by bringing that portion of her which contains the island of Britain, gradually in greater proximity to the sun, she had produced that state of things on that particular part of her which is known among mortals as spring. Now, I am very anxious to please all parties. Some people like a little circumlocution, and for them the above paragraph was written; others do not, and for them, I state that it was the latter end of May, and beg them not to read the above flight of fancy, but to consider it as never having been written.

It was spring. On the sea-coast, the watchers at the lighthouses and the preventive stations began to walk about in their shirt-sleeves, and trim up their patches of spray-beaten garden, hedged with tree-mallow and tamarisk, and to thank God that the long howling winter nights were past for a time. The fishermen shouted merrily one to another as they put off from shore, no longer dreading a twelve hours' purgatory of sleet and freezing mist and snow; saying to one another how green the land looked, and how pleasant mackarel time was after all. Their wives, light-hearted at the thought that the

wild winter was past, and that they were not widows, brought their work out to the doors, and gossiped pleasantly in the sun, while some of the bolder boys began to paddle about in the surf, and try to believe that the Gulf Stream had come in, and that it was summer again, and not only spring.

In inland country places the barley was all in and springing, the meadows were all bush-harrowed, rolled, and laid up for hay; nay, in early places, brimful of grass, spangled with purple orchises, and in moist rich places golden with marsh marigold, over which the south-west wind passed pleasantly, bringing a sweet perfume of growing vegetation, which gave those who smelt it a tendency to lean against gates, and stiles, and such places, and think what a delicious season it was, and wish it were to last for ever. The young men began to slip away from work somewhat early of an evening, not (as now) to the parade ground, or the butts, but to take their turn at the wicket on the green, where Sir John (our young landlord), was to be found in a scarlet flannel shirt, bowling away like a catapult, at all comers, till the second bell began to ring, and he had to dash off and dress. Now lovers walking by moonlight in deep banked lanes began to notice how dark and broad the shadows grew, and to wait at the lane's end by the river, to listen to the nightingale, with his breast against the thorn, ranging on from height to height of melodious passion, petulant at his want of art, till he broke into one wild jubilant burst, and ceased, leaving

night silent, save for the whispering of new-born insects, and the creeping sound of reviving vegetation.

Spring. The great renewal of the lease. The time when nature-worshippers make good resolutions, to be very often broken before the leaves fall. The time the country becomes once more habitable and agreeable. Does it make any difference in the hundred miles of brick and mortar called London, save, in so far as it makes every reasonable Christian pack up his portmanteau and fly to the green fields, and lover's lanes beforementioned (though it takes two people for the latter sort of business)? Why, yes; it makes a difference to London certainly, by bringing somewhere about 10,000 people, who have got sick of shooting and hunting through the winter months, swarming into the west end of it, and making it what is called full.

I don't know that they are wrong after all, for London is a mighty pleasant place in the season (we don't call it spring on the paving-stones). At this time the windows of the great houses in the squares begin to be brilliant with flowers; and, under the awnings of the balconies, one sees women moving about in the shadow. Now, all through the short night, one hears the ceaseless low rolling thunder of beautiful carriages, and in the daytime also the noise ceases not. All through the west end of the town there is a smell of flowers, of fresh watered roads, and Macassar oil; while at Covent Garden, the scent of the peaches and pine-apples begins to prevail over that of rotten cabbage-

stalks. The fiddlers are all fiddling away at concert pitch for their lives, the actors are all acting their very hardest, and, the men who look after the horses, have never a minute to call their own, day or night.

It is neither to dukes nor duchesses, to actors nor fiddlers, that we must turn our attention just now, but to a man who was sitting in a wheelbarrow watching a tame jackdaw.

The place was a London mews, behind one of the great squares—the time was afternoon. The weather was warm and sunny. All the proprietors of the horses were out riding or driving, and so the stables were empty and the mews were quiet.

This was about a week after Charles's degradation, almost the first hour he had to himself in the daytime, and so he sat pondering on his unhappy lot.

Lord Ballyroundtower's coachman's wife was hanging out the clothes. She was an Irishwoman off the estate (his lordship's Irish residences, I see on referring to the peerage, are, "The Grove," Blarney, and "Swatewathers," near Avoca). When I say that she was hanging out the clothes I am hardly correct, for she was only fixing the lines up to do so, and being of short stature, and having to reach, was naturally showing her heels, and the jackdaw perceiving this, began to hop stealthily across the yard. Charles saw what was coming and became deeply interested. He would not have spoken for his life. The jackdaw sidled up to her, and began digging into her tendon Achilles with his hard bill with

a force and rapidity which showed that he was fully aware of the fact, that the amusement, like most pleasant things, could not last long, and must therefore be made the most of. Some women would have screamed and faced round at the first assault. Not so our Irish friend. She endured the anguish until she had succeeded in fastening the clothes-line round the post, and then she turned round on the jackdaw, who had fluttered away to a safe distance, and denounced him.

"Bad cess to ye, ye impident divvle, sure it's Sathan's own sister's son ye are, ye dirty prothestant, pecking at the hales of an honest woman, daughter of my lord's own man, Corny O'Brine, as was a dale bether nor them as sits on whalebarrows and sets ye on too't—(this was levelled at Charles, so he politely took off his cap and bowed).

"Though, God forgive me, there's some sitting on whalebarrows as should be sitting in drawing-rooms may be (here the jackdaw raised one foot, and said "Jark"). Get out ye baste, don't ye hear me blessed lady's own bird swearing at ye, like a gentleman's bird as he is. A pretty dear."

This was strictly true. Lord Ballyroundtower's brother, the Honourable Frederick Mulligan, was a lieutenant in the navy. A short time before this, being on the Australian station, and wishing to make his sister-in-law a handsome present, he had commissioned a Sydney Jew bird-dealer to get him a sulphur-crested cockatoo, price no object, but the best talker in the

colony. The Jew faithfully performed his behest; he got him the best talking cockatoo in the colony, and the Hon. Fred, brought it home in triumph to his sister-in-law's drawing-room in Belgrave Square.

The bird was a beautiful talker. There was no doubt about that. It had such an amazingly distinct enunciation. But then the bird was not always discreet. Nay, to go further, the bird never *was* discreet. He had been educated by a convict bullock-driver, and finished off by the sailors on board H.M.S. *Actæon*, and really you know, sometimes he did say things he ought not to have said. It was all very well pretending that you couldn't hear him, but it rendered conversation impossible. You were always in agony at what was to come next. One afternoon a great many people were there, calling. Old Lady Hainault was there. The bird was worse than ever. Every body tried to avoid a silence, but it came, inexorably. That awful old woman, Lady Hainault, broke it by saying that she thought Fred Mulligan must have been giving the bird private lessons himself. After that you know it wouldn't do. Fred might be angry, but the bird must go to the mews.

So there the bird was, swearing dreadfully at the jackdaw. At last her ladyship's pug dog, who was staying with the coachman for medical treatment, got excited, bundled out of the house, and attacked the jackdaw. The jackdaw formed square to resist cavalry, and sent the dog howling into the house again quicker

than he came out. After which the bird barked and came and sat on the dunghill by Charles.

The mews itself, as I said, was very quiet, with a smell of stable, subdued by a fresh scent of sprinkled water; but at the upper end it joined a street leading from Belgrave Square towards the Park, which was by no means quiet, and which smelt of geraniums and heliotropes. Carriage after carriage went blazing past the end of the mews, along this street, like figures across the disk of a magic lanthorn. Some had scarlet breeches, and some blue; and there were pink bonnets, and yellow bonnets, and Magenta bonnets; and Charles sat on the wheelbarrow by the dunghill, and looked at it all, perfectly contented.

A stray dog lounged in out of the street. It was a cur dog—that any one might see. It was a dog which had bit its rope and run away, for the rope was round its neck now; and it was a thirsty dog, for it went up to the pump and licked the stones. Charles went and pumped for it, and it drank. Then, evidently considering that Charles, by his act of good nature, had acquired authority over its person, and having tried to do without a master already, and having found it wouldn't do, it sat down beside Charles and declined to proceed any further.

There was a public-house at the corner of the mews, where it joined the street; and on the other side of the street you could see one house, No. 16. The footman of No. 16 was in the area, looking through the railings.

A thirsty man came to the public-house on horseback, and drank a pot of beer at a draught, turning the pot upside down. It was too much for the footman, who disappeared.

Next came a butcher with a tray of meat, who turned into the area of No. 16, and left the gate open. After him came a blind man, led by a dog. The dog, instead of going straight on, turned down the area steps after the butcher. The blind man thought he was going round the corner. Charles saw what would happen; but, before he had time to cry out, the blind man had plunged headlong down the area steps and disappeared, while from the bottom, as from the pit, arose the curses of the butcher.

Charles and others assisted the blind man up, gave him some beer, and set him on his way. Charles watched him. After he had gone a little way, he began striking spitefully at where he thought his dog was, with his stick. The dog was evidently used to this amusement, and dexterously avoided the blows. Finding vertical blows of no avail, the blind man tried horizontal ones, and caught an old gentleman across the shins, making him drop his umbrella and catch up his leg. The blind man promptly asked an alms from him, and, not getting one, turned the corner; and Charles saw him no more.

The hot street and, beyond, the square, the dusty lilacs and laburnums, and the crimson hawthorns. What a day for a bathe! outside the gentle surf, with

the sunny headlands right and left, and the moor sleeping quietly in the afternoon sunlight, and Lundy, like a faint blue cloud on the Atlantic horizon, and the old house——He was away at Ravenshoe on a May afternoon.

They say poets are never sane; but are they ever mad? Never. Even old Cowper saved himself from actual madness by using his imagination. Charles was no poet; but he was a good day-dreamer, and so now, instead of maddening himself in his squalid brick prison, he was away in the old bay, bathing and fishing, and wandering up the old stream, breast high among king-fern under the shadowy oaks.

Bricks and mortar, carriages and footmen, wheelbarrows and dunghills, all came back in one moment, and settled on his outward senses with a jar. For there was a rattle of horse's feet on the stones, and the clank of a sabre, and Lieutenant Hornby, of the 140th Hussars (Prince Arthur's Own), came branking into the yard, with two hundred pounds' worth of trappings on him, looking out for his servant. He was certainly a splendid fellow, and Charles looked at him with a certain kind of pride, as on something that he had a share in.

"Come round to the front door, Horton, and take my horse up to the barracks" (the Queen had been to the station that morning, and his guard was over.)

Charles walked beside him round into Grosvenor Place. He could not avoid stealing a glance up at the magnificent apparition beside him; and, as he did

so, he met a pair of kind grey eyes looking down on him.

"You mustn't sit and mope there, Horton," said the lieutenant; "it never does to mope. I know it is infernally hard to help it, and of course you can't associate with servants, and that sort of thing, at first; but you will get used to it. If you think I don't know you are a gentleman, you are mistaken. I don't know who you are, and shall not try to find out. I'll lend you books or anything of that sort; but you mustn't brood over it. I can't stand seeing my fellows wretched, more especially a fellow like you."

If it had been to save his life, Charles couldn't say a word. He looked up at the lieutenant and nodded his head. The lieutenant understood him well enough, and said to himself—

"Poor fellow!"

So there arose between these two a feeling which lightened Charles's servitude, and which before the end came had grown into a liking. Charles's vengeance was not for Hornby, for the injury did not come from him. His vengeance was reserved for another, and we shall see how he took it.

CHAPTER VII.

A GLIMPSE OF SOME OLD FRIENDS.

HITHERTO I have been able to follow Charles right on without leaving him for one instant: now, however, that he is reduced to sitting on a wheelbarrow in a stable-yard, we must see a little less of him. He is, of course, our principal object; but he has removed himself from the immediate sphere of all our other acquaintances, and so we must look up some of them, and see how far they, though absent, are acting on his destiny—nay, we must look up every one of them sooner or later, for there is not one who is not in some way concerned in his adventures past and future.

By reason of her age, her sex, and her rank, my Lady Ascot claims our attention first. We left the dear old woman in a terrible taking, on finding that Charles had suddenly left the house and disappeared. Her wrath gave way to tears, and her tears to memory. Bitterly she blamed herself now for what seemed, years ago, such a harmless deceit. It was not too late. Charles might be found; would come back, surely—would come back to his poor old aunt! He would never—hush! it won't do to think of that!

Lady Ascot thought of a brilliant plan, and put it into immediate execution. She communicated with Mr. Scotland Yard, the eminent ex-detective officer, forwarding a close description of Charles, and a request that he might be found, alive or dead, immediately. Her efforts were crowned with immediate and unlooked-for success. In a week's time the detective had discovered, not one Charles Ravenshoe, but three, from which her ladyship might take her choice. But the worst of it was that neither of the three was Charles Ravenshoe. There was a remarkable point of similarity between Charles and them, certainly; and that point was, that they were all three young gentlemen under a cloud, and had all three dark hair and prominent features. Here the similarity ended.

The first of the cases placed so promptly before her ladyship by Inspector Yard presented some startling features of similarity with that of Charles. The young gentleman was from the West of England, had been at college somewhere, had been extravagant ("God bless him, poor dear! when lived a Ravenshoe that wasn't?" thought Lady Ascot), had been crossed in love, the inspector believed (Lady Ascot thought she had got her fish), and was now in the Coldbath Fields Prison, doing two years' hard labour for swindling, of which two months were yet to run. The inspector would let her ladyship know the day of his release.

This could not be Charles: and the next young gentleman offered to her notice was a worse shot than

the other. He also was dark-haired; but here at once all resemblance ceased. This one had started in life with an ensigncy in the line. He had embezzled the mess-funds, had been to California, had enlisted, deserted, and sold his kit, been a billiard-marker, had come into some property, had spent it, had enlisted again, had been imprisoned for a year and discharged—here Lady Ascot would read no more, but laid down the letter, saying, "Pish!"

But the inspector's cup was not yet full. The unhappy man was acting from uncertain information, he says. He affirmed, throughout all the long and acrimonious discussion which followed, that his only instructions were to find a young gentleman with dark hair and a hook nose. If this be the case, he may possibly be excused for catching a curly-headed little Jew of sixteen, who was drinking himself to death in a public-house off Regent Street, and producing him as Charles Ravenshoe. His name was Cohen, and he had stolen some money from his father and gone to the races. This was so utterly the wrong article, that Lady Ascot wrote a violent letter to the ex-inspector, of such an extreme character, that he replied by informing her ladyship that he had sent her letter to his lawyer. A very pretty quarrel followed, which I have not time to describe.

No tidings of Charles! He had hidden himself too effectually. So the old woman wept and watched—watched for her darling who came not, and for the ruin

that she saw settling down upon her house like a dark cloud, that grew evermore darker.

And little Mary had packed up her boxes and passed out of the old house, with the hard, bitter world before her. Father Mackworth had met her in the hall, and had shaken hands with her in silence. He loved her, in his way, so much, that he cared not to say anything. Cuthbert was outside, waiting to hand her to her carriage. When she was seated he said, "I shall write to you, Mary, for I can't say all I would." And then he opened the door and kissed her affectionately; then the carriage went on, and before it entered the wood, she had a glimpse of the grey old house, and Cuthbert on the steps before the porch, bareheaded, waving his hand; then it was among the trees, and she had seen the last of him for ever; then she buried her face in her hands, and knew, for the first time, perhaps, how well she had loved him.

She was going, as we know, to be nursery-governess to the orphan children of Lord Hainault's brother. She went straight to London to assume her charge. It was very late when she got to Paddington. One of Lord Hainault's carriages was waiting for her, and she was whirled through "the season" to Grosvenor Square. Then she had to walk alone into the great lighted hall, with the servants standing right and left, and looking at nothing, as well-bred servants are bound to do. She wished for a moment that the poor little governess had been allowed to come in a cab.

The groom of the chambers informed her that her ladyship had gone out, and would not be home till late; that his lordship was dressing; and that dinner was ready in Miss Corby's room whenever she pleased.

So she went up. She did not eat much dinner; the steward's-room boy in attendance had his foolish heart moved to pity by seeing how poor an appetite she had, when he thought what *he* could have done in that line too.

Presently she asked the lad where was the nursery. The second door to the right. When all was quiet she opened her door, and thought she would go and see the children asleep. At that moment the nursery-door opened, and a tall, handsome quiet-looking man came out. It was Lord Hainault; she had seen him before.

"I like this," said she, as she drew back. "It was kind of him to go and see his brother's children before he went out;" and so she went into the nursery.

An old nurse was sitting by the fire sewing. The two elder children were asleep; but the youngest, an audacious young sinner of three, had refused to do anything of the kind until the cat came to bed with him. The nursery cat being at that time out a-walking on the leads, the nursemaid had been despatched to borrow one from the kitchen. At this state of affairs Mary entered. The nurse rose and curtsied, and the rebel clambered on her knee, and took her into his confidence. He told her that that day, while walking in the square, he had seen a chimney-sweep; that he had called to

Gus and Flora to come and look; that Gus had been in time and seen him go round the corner, but that Flora had come too late, and cried, and so Gus had lent her his hoop and she had left off, &c. &c. After a time he requested to be allowed to say his prayers to her; to which the nurse objected, on the theological ground that he had said them twice already that evening, which was once more than was usually allowed. Soon after this the little head lay heavy on Mary's arm, and the little hand loosed its hold on hers, and the child was asleep.

She left the nursery with a lightened heart; but, nevertheless, she cried herself to sleep. "I wonder, shall I like Lady Hainault; Charles used to. But she is very proud, I believe. I cannot remember much of her.—How those carriages growl and roll, almost like the sea at dear old Ravenshoe." Then, after a time, she slept.

There was a light in her eyes, not of dawn, which woke her. A tall, handsome woman, in silk and jewels, came and knelt beside her and kissed her; and said that, now her old home was broken up, she must make one there, and be a sister to her, and many other kind words of the same sort. It was Lady Hainault (the long Burton girl, as Madam Adelaide called her) come home from her last party; and in such kind keeping I think we may leave little Mary for the present.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH FRESH MISCHIEF IS BREWED.

CHARLES'S duties were light enough; he often wished they had been heavier. There were such long idle periods left for thinking and brooding. He rather wondered at first why he was not more employed. He never was in attendance on the lieutenant, save in the daytime. One of the young men under him drove the brougham, and was out all night and in bed all day; and the other was a mere stable-lad from the country. Charles's duty consisted almost entirely in dressing himself about two o'clock, and loitering about town after his master; and, after he had been at this work about a fortnight, it seemed to him as if he had been at it a year or more.

Charles soon found out all he cared to know about the lieutenant. He was the only son and heir of an eminent solicitor, lately deceased, who had put him into the splendid regiment to which he belonged, in order to get him into good society. The young fellow had done well enough in that way. He was amazingly rich, amazingly handsome, and passionately fond of his profession, at which he really worked hard; but he was terribly fast. Charles soon found that out; and the

first object which he placed before himself, when he began to awaken from the first dead torpor which came on him after his fall; was to gain influence with him and save him from ruin.

"He is burning the candle at both ends," said Charles. "He is too good to go to the deuce. In time, if I am careful, he may listen to me."

And, indeed, it seemed probable. From the very first, Hornby had treated Charles with great respect and consideration. Hornby knew he was a gentleman. One morning, before Charles had been many days with him, the brougham had not come into the mews till seven o'clock; and Charles, going to his lodgings at eight, had found him in uniform, bolting a cup of coffee before going on duty. There was a great pile of money, sovereigns and notes, on the dressing-table, and he caught Charles looking at it.

Hornby laughed. "What are you looking at with that solemn face of yours?" said he.

"Nothing, sir," said Charles.

"You are looking at that money," said Hornby; "and you are thinking that it would be as well if I didn't stay out all night playing—eh?"

"I might have thought so, sir," said Charles. "I did think so."

"Quite right, too. Some day I will leave off, perhaps."

And then he rattled out of the room, and Charles watched him riding down the street, all blue, and

scarlet, and gold, a brave figure, with the world at his feet.

"There is time yet," said Charles.

The first time Charles made his appearance in livery in the street he felt horribly guilty. He was in continual terror lest he should meet some one he knew; but, after a time, when he found that day after day he could walk about and see never a familiar face, he grew bolder. He wished sometimes he could see some one he knew from a distance, so as not to be recognised—it was so terribly lonely.

Day after day he saw the crowds pass him in the street, and recognised no one. In old times, when he used to come to London on a raid from Oxford, he fancied he used to recognise an acquaintance at every step; but, now, day after day went on, and he saw no one he knew. The world had become to him like a long uneasy dream of strange faces.

After a very few days of his new life, there began to grow on him a desire to hear of those he had left so abruptly; a desire which was at first mere curiosity, but which soon developed into a yearning regret. At first, after a week or so, he began idly wondering where they all were, and what they thought of his disappearance; and at this time, perhaps, he may have felt a little conceited in thinking how he occupied their thoughts, and of what importance he had made himself by his sudden disappearance. But his curiosity and vanity soon wore away, and were succeeded by a deep gnawing desire to

hear something of them all—to catch hold of some little thread, however thin, which should connect him with his past life, and with those he had loved so well. He would have died in his obstinacy sooner than move one inch towards his object; but every day, as he rode about town, dressed in the livery of servitude, which he tried to think was his heritage, and yet of which he was ashamed, he stared hither and thither at the passing faces, trying to find one, were it only that of the meanest servant, which should connect him with the past.

At last, and before long, he saw some one.

One afternoon he was under orders to attend his master, on horseback, as usual. After lunch, Hornby came out, beautifully dressed, handsome and happy, and rode up Grosvenor Place into the park. At the entrance to Rotten Row he joined an old gentleman and his two daughters, and they rode together, chatting pleasantly. Charles rode behind with the other groom, who talked to him about the coming Derby, and would have betted against Haphazard at the current odds. They rode up and down the Row twice, and then Hornby, calling Charles, gave him his horse and walked about by the Serpentine, talking to every one, and getting a kindly welcome from great and small; for the son of a great attorney, with wealth, manners, and person, may get into very good society, if he is worth it; or, quite possibly, if he isn't.

Then Hornby and Charles left the park, and, coming down Grosvenor Place, passed into Pall Mall. Here

Hornby went into a club, and left Charles waiting in the street with his horse half an hour or more.

Then he mounted again, and rode up St. James's Street into Piccadilly. He turned to the left; and, at the bottom of the hill, not far from Halfmoon Street, he went into a private house, and, giving Charles his reins, told him to wait for him; and so Charles waited there in the afternoon sun, watching what went by.

It was a sleepy afternoon, and the horses stood quiet, and Charles was a contented fellow, and he rather liked dozing there and watching the world go by. There is plenty to see in Piccadilly on an afternoon in the season, even for a passer-by; but, sitting on a quiet horse, with nothing to do or think about, one can see it all better. And Charles had some humour in him, and so he was amused at what he saw, and would have sat there an hour or more without impatience.

Opposite to him was a great bonnet-shop, and in front of it was an orange-woman. A grand carriage dashed up to the bonnet-shop, so that he had to move his horses, and the orange-woman had to get out of the way. Two young ladies got out of the carriage, went in, and (as he believes) bought bonnets, leaving a third, and older one, sitting in the back seat, who nursed a pug dog, with a blue riband. Neither the coachman nor footman belonging to the carriage seemed to mind this lady. The footman thought he would like some oranges; so he went to the orange-woman. The orange-woman was Irish, for her speech bewrayed her, and the footman

was from the county Clare; so those two instantly began comparing notes about those delectable regions, to such purpose, that the two young ladies, having, let us hope, suited themselves in the bonnet way, had to open their own carriage-door and get in, before the footman was recalled to a sense of his duties—after which he shut the door, and they drove away.

Then there came by a blind man. It was not the same blind man that Charles saw fall down the area, because that blind man's dog was a brown one, with a curly tail, and this one's dog was black, with no tail at all. Moreover, the present dog carried a basket, which the other one did not. Otherwise they were so much alike (all blind men are), that Charles might have mistaken one for the other. This blind man met with no such serious accident as the other, either. Only, turning into the public-house at the corner, opposite Mr. Hope's, the dog lagged behind, and, the swing-doors closing between him and his master, Charles saw him pulled through by his chain and nearly throttled.

Next there came by Lord Palmerston, with his umbrella on his shoulder, walking airily arm-in-arm with Lord John Russell. They were talking together; and, as they passed, Charles heard Lord Palmerston say that it was much warmer on this side of the street than on the other. With which proposition Lord John Russell appeared to agree; and so they passed on westward.

After this there came by three prize-fighters, arm-in-arm; each of them had a white hat and a cigar; two

had white bull-dogs, and one a black and tan terrier. They made a left wheel, and looked at Charles and his horses, and then they made a right wheel, and looked into the bonnet-shop ; after which they went into the public-house into which the blind man had gone before ; and, from the noise which immediately arose from inside, Charles came to the conclusion, that the two white bull-dogs and the black and tan terrier had set upon the blind man's dog, and touzled him.

After the prize-fighters came Mr. Gladstone, walking very fast. A large Newfoundland dog with a walking-stick in his mouth, blundered up against him, and nearly threw him down. Before he got under way again, the Irish orange-woman bore down on him, and faced him with three oranges in each hand, offering them for sale. Did she know, with the sagacity of her nation, that he was then on his way to the house, to make a Great Statement, and that he would want oranges? I cannot say. He probably got his oranges at Bellamy's, for he bought none of her. After him came a quantity of indifferent people ; and then Charles's heart beat high—for here was some one coming whom he knew with a vengeance.

Lord Welter, walking calmly down the street, with his big chest thrown out, and his broad, stupid face in moody repose. He was thinking. He came so close to Charles that, stepping aside to avoid a passer-by, he whitened the shoulder of his coat against the pipe-clay on Charles's knee ; then he stood stock still within six

inches of him, but looking the other way towards the houses.

He pulled off one of his gloves and bit his nails. Though his back was towards Charles, still Charles knew well what expression was on his face as he did that. The old cruel lowering of the eyebrows, and pinching in of the lips was there, he knew. The same expression as that which Marston remarked the time he quarrelled with Cuthbert once at Ravenshoe—mischief!

He went into the house where Charles's master, Hornby, was; and Charles sat and wondered.

Presently there came out, on to the balcony above, six or seven well-dressed young men, who lounged with their elbows on the red cushions which were fixed to the railing, and talked, looking at the people in the street.

Lord Welter and Lieutenant Hornby were together at the end. There was no scowl on Welter's face now; he was making himself agreeable. Charles watched him and Hornby; the conversation between them got eager, and they seemed to make an appointment. After that they parted, and Hornby came down stairs and got on his horse.

They rode very slowly home. Hornby bowed right and left to the people he knew, but seemed absent. When Charles took his horse at the door, he said suddenly to Charles—

"I have been talking to a man who knows something of you, I believe—Lord Welter."

"Did you mention me to him, sir?" said Charles.

"No; I didn't think of it."

"You would do me a great kindness if you would not do so, sir."

"Why?" said Hornby, looking suddenly up.

"I am sorry I cannot enter into particulars, sir; but, if I thought he would know where I was, I should at once quit your service and try to lose myself once more."

"Lose yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"H'm!" said Hornby, thoughtfully. "Well I know there is something about you which I don't understand. I ain't sure it is any business of mine though. I will say nothing. You are not a man to chatter about anything you see. Mind you don't. You see how I trust you." And so he went in, and Charles went round to the stable.

"Is the brougham going out to-night?" he asked of his fellow-servant.

"Ordered at ten," said the man. "Night-work again, I expect. I wanted to get out too. Consume the darned card-playing. Was you going anywhere to-night?"

"Nowhere," said Charles.

"It's a beautiful evening," said the man. "If you should by chance saunter up toward Grosvenor Square, and could leave a note for me, I should thank you very much; upon my soul, I should."

I don't think Charles ever hesitated at doing a good-

natured action in his life. A request to him was like a command. It came as natural to him now to take a dirty, scrawled love-letter from a groom to a scullery-maid as in old times it did to lend a man fifty pounds. He said at once he would go with great pleasure.

The man (a surly fellow enough at ordinary times) thanked him heartily; and, when Charles had got the letter, he sauntered away in that direction slowly, thinking of many things.

"By Jove," he said, to himself, "my scheme of hiding does not seem to be very successful. Little more than a fortnight gone, and I am thrown against Welter. What a strange thing!"

It was still early in the afternoon—seven o'clock, or thereabouts—and he was opposite Tattersall's. A mail phaeton, with a pair of splendid horses, attracted his attention and diverted his thoughts. He turned down. Two eminent men on the turf walked past him up the nearly empty yard, and he heard one say to the other,—

"Ascot will run to win; that I know. He *must*. If Haphazard can stay, he is safe."

To which the other said, "Pish!" and they passed on.

"There they are again," said Charles, as he turned back. "The very birds of the air are talking about them. It gets interesting, though—if anything could ever be interesting again."

St. George's Hospital. At the door was a gaudily dressed, handsome young woman, who was asking the

porter could she see some one inside. No. The visiting-hours were over. She stood for a few minutes on the steps, impatiently biting her nails, and then fluttered down the street.

What made him think of his sister Ellen? She must be found. That was the only object in the world, so to speak. There was nothing to be done, only to wait and watch.

"I shall find her some day, in God's good time."

The world had just found out that it was hungry, and was beginning to tear about in wheeled vehicles to its neighbours' houses to dinner. As the carriages passed Charles, he could catch glimpses of handsome girls, all a mass of white muslin, swan's-down fans, and fal-lals, going to begin their night's work; of stiff dandies, in white ties, yawning already; of old ladies in jewels, and old gentlemen buttoned up across the chest, going, as one might say, to see fair play among the young people. And then our philosophical Charles pleased himself by picturing how, in two months more, the old gentlemen would be among their turnips, the old ladies among their flowers and their poor folks, the dandies creeping, creeping, weary hours through the heather, till the last maddening moment when the big stag was full in view, sixty yards off; and (prettiest thought of all), how the girls, with their thick shoes on, would be gossiping with old Goody Blake and Harry Gill, or romping with the village school-children on the lawn. Right, old Charles, with all but the dandies!

For now the apotheosis of dandies was approaching. The time was coming when so many of them should disappear into that black thunder-cloud to the south, and be seen no more in park or club, in heather or stubble.

But, in that same year, the London season went on much as usual; only folks talked of war, and the French were more popular than they are now. And through the din and hubbub poor Charles passed on like a lost sheep, and left his fellow-servant's note at an area in Grosvenor Square.

"And which," said he to the man who took it, with promises of instant delivery, "is my Lord Hainault's house, now, for instance?"

Lord Hainault's house was the other side of the square; number something. Charles thanked the man, and went across. When he had made it out, he leant his back against the railings of the square, and watched it.

The carriage was at the door. The coachman, seeing a handsomely-dressed groom leaning against the rails, called to him to come over and alter some strap or another. Charles ran over and helped him. Charles supposed her ladyship was going out to dinner. Yes, her ladyship was now coming out. And, almost before Charles had time to move out of the way, out she came, with her head in the air, more beautiful than ever, and drove away.

He went back to his post from mere idleness. He wondered whether Mary had come there yet or not. He

had half a mind to inquire, but was afraid of being seen. He still leant against the railings of the gate, as I said, in mere idleness, when he heard the sound of children's voices in the square behind.

"That woman," said a child's voice, "was a gipsy-woman. I looked through the rails, and I said, 'Hallo, ma'am, what are you doing there?' And she asked me for a penny. And I said I couldn't give her anything, for I had given three halfpence to the Punch and Judy; and I shouldn't have any more money till next Saturday. Which was quite true, Flora, as you know."

"But, Gus," said another child's voice, "if she had been a gipsy-woman she would have tried to steal you, and make you beg in the streets; or else she would have told your fortune in coffee-grounds. I don't think she was a real gipsy."

"I should like to have my fortune told in the coffee-grounds," said Gus; "but, if she had tried to steal me, I should have kicked her in her stomach. There is a groom outside there; let us ask him. Grooms go to the races, and see heaps of gipsies! I say, sir."

Charles turned. A child's voice was always music to him. He had such a look on his face as he turned to them, that the children had his confidence in an instant. The gipsy question was laid before him instantly, by both Gus and Flora, with immense volubility, and he was just going to give an oracular opinion through the railings, when a voice—a low, gentle voice, which made him start—came from close by.

"Gus and Flora, my dears, the dew is falling. Let us go in."

"There is Miss Corby," said Gus. "Let us run to her."

They raced to Mary. Soon after the three came to the gate, laughing, and passed close to him. The children were clinging to her skirt and talking merrily. They formed a pretty little group as they went across the street, and Mary's merry little laugh comforted him, "She is happy there," he said; "best as it is!"

Once, when half-way across the street, she turned and looked towards him, before he had time to turn away. He saw that she did not dream of his being there, and went on. And so Charles sauntered home through the pleasant summer evening, saying to himself, "I think she is happy; I am glad she laughed."

"Three meetings in one day! I shall be found out, if I don't mind. I must be very careful."

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH AN ENTIRELY NEW, AND, AS WILL BE SEEN HEREAFTER, A MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTER IS INTRODUCED.

THE servants, I mean the stable-servants, who lived in the mews where Charles did, had a club; and, a night or two after he had seen Mary in the square, he was elected a member of it. The duke's coachman, a wiry, grey, stern-looking, elderly man, waited upon him and informed him of the fact. He said that such a course was very unusual—in fact, without precedent. Men, he said, were seldom elected to the club until they were known to have been in good service for some years; but he (coachman) had the ear of the club pretty much, and had brought him in triumphant. He added that he could see through a brick wall as well as most men, and that, when he see a *gentleman* dressed in a livery, moping and brooding about the mews, he had said to himself that he wanted a little company, such as it was, to cheer him up, and so he had requested the club, &c.; and the club had done as he told them.

"Now, this is confoundedly kind of you," said Charles; "but I am not a gentleman; I am a gamekeeper's son."

"I suppose you can read Greek, now, can't you?" said the coachman.

Charles was obliged to confess he could.

"Of course," said the coachman; "all gamekeepers' sons is forced to learn Greek, in order as they may slang the poachers in an unknown tongue. Fiddle-dedee! I know all about it; leastwise, guess. Come along with me; why, I've got sons as old as you. Come along."

"Are they in service?" said Charles, by way of something to say.

"Two of 'em are, but one's in the army."

"Indeed!" said Charles, with more interest.

"Ay; he is in your governor's regiment."

"Does he like it?" said Charles. "I should like to know him."

"Like it?—don't he?" said the coachman. "See what society he gets into. I suppose there ain't no gentlemen's sons troopers in that regiment, eh? Oh dear no. Don't for a moment suppose it, young man. Not at all."

Charles was very much interested by this news. He made up his mind there and then that he would enlist immediately. But he didn't; he only thought about it.

Charles found that the club was composed of about a dozen coachmen and superior pad-grooms. They were very civil to him, and to one another. There was nothing to laugh at. There was nothing that could

be tortured into ridicule. They talked about their horses and their business quite naturally. There was an air of kindly fellowship, and a desire for mutual assistance among them, which, at times, Charles had not noticed at the university. One man sang a song, and sang it very prettily too, about stag-hunting. He had got as far as—

> "As every breath with sobs he drew,
> The labouring buck strained full in view,"

when the door opened, and an oldish groom came in.

The song was not much attended to now. When the singer had finished, the others applauded him, but impatiently; and then there was a general exclamation of "Well?"

"I've just come down from the corner. There has been a regular run against Haphazard, and no one knows why. Something wrong with the horse, I suppose, because there's been no run on any other in particular, only against him."

"Was Lord Ascot there?" said some one.

"Ah, that he was. Wouldn't bet, though, even at the long odds. Said he'd got every sixpence he was worth on the horse, and would stand where he was; and that's true, they say. And master says, likewise, that Lord Welter would have taken 'em, but that his father stopped him."

"That looks queerish," said some one else.

"Ay, and wasn't there a jolly row, too?"

"Who with?" asked several.

"Lord Welter and Lord Hainault. It happened outside, close to me. Lord Hainault was walking across the yard, and Lord Welter came up to him and said, 'How d'ye do, Hainault?' and Lord Hainault turned round and said, quite quiet, 'Welter, you are a scoundrel!' And Lord Welter said, 'Hainault, you are out of your senses;' but he turned pale, too, and he looked —Lord! I shouldn't like to have been before him— and Lord Hainault says, 'You know what I mean;' and Lord Welter says, 'No, I don't; but, by Gad, you shall tell me;' and then the other says, as steady as a rock, 'I'll tell you. You are a man that one daren't leave a woman alone with. Where's that Casterton girl? Where's Adelaide Summers? Neither a friend's house, nor your own father's house, is any protection for a woman against you.' 'Gad,' says Lord Welter, 'You were pretty sweet on the last-named yourself, once on a time.'"

"Well!" said some one, "and what did Lord Hainault say?"

"He said, 'You are a liar and a scoundrel, Welter.' And then Lord Welter came at him; but Lord Ascot came between them, shaking like anything, and says he, 'Hainault, go away, for God's sake; you don't know what you are saying.—Welter, be silent.' But they made no more of he than——" (here our friend was at a loss for a simile).

"But how did it end?" asked Charles.

"Well," said the speaker, "General Mainwaring came up, and laid his hand on Lord Welter's shoulder, and took him off pretty quiet. And that's all I know about it."

It was clearly all. Charles rose to go, and walked by himself from street to street, thinking.

Suppose he *was* to be thrown against Lord Welter, how should he act? what should he say? Truly it was a puzzling question. The anomaly of his position was never put before him more strikingly than now. What could he say? what could he do?

After the first shock, the thought of Adelaide's unfaithfulness was not so terrible as on the first day or two; many little unamiable traits of character, vanity, selfishness, and so on, unnoticed before, began to come forth in somewhat startling relief. Anger, indignation, and love, all three jumbled up together, each one by turns in the ascendant, were the frames of mind in which Charles found himself when he began thinking about her. One moment he was saying to himself, "How beautiful she was!" and the next, "She was as treacherous as a tiger; she never could have cared for me." But, when he came to think of Welter, his anger overmastered everything, and he would clench his teeth as he walked along, and for a few moments feel the blood rushing to his head and singing in his ears. Let us hope that Lord Welter will not come across him while he is in that mood, or there will be mischief.

But his anger was soon over. He had just had one

of these fits of anger as he walked along; and he was, like a good fellow, trying to conquer it, by thinking of Lord Welter as he was as a boy, and before he was a villain, when he came before St. Peter's Church, in Eaton Square, and stopped to look at some fine horses which were coming out of Salter's.

At the east end of St. Peter's Church there is a piece of bare white wall in a corner, and in front of the wall was a little shoeblack.

He was not one of the regular brigade, with a red shirt, but an "Arab" of the first water. He might have been seven or eight years old, but was small. His whole dress consisted of two garments; a ragged shirt, with no buttons, and half of one sleeve gone, and a ragged pair of trousers, which, small as he was, were too small for him, and barely reached below his knees. His feet and head were bare; and under a wild, tangled shock of hair looked a pretty, dirty, roguish face, with a pair of grey, twinkling eyes, which was amazingly comical. Charles stopped, watching him, and, as he did so, felt what we have most of us felt, I dare say—that, at certain times of vexation and anger, the company and conversation of children is the best thing for us.

The little man was playing at fives against the bare wall, with such tremendous energy that he did not notice that Charles had stopped and was looking at him. Every nerve in his wiry lean little body was braced up to the game; his heart and soul were as

deeply enlisted in it, as though he were captain of the eleven, or stroke of the eight.

He had no ball to play with, but he played with a brass button. The button flew hither and thither, being so irregular in shape, and the boy dashed after it like lightning. At last, after he had kept up five-and-twenty or so, the button flew over his head and lighted at Charles's feet.

As the boy turned to get it, his eyes met Charles's, and he stopped, parting the long hair from his forehead, and gazing on him till the beautiful little face, beautiful through dirt and ignorance and neglect, lit up with a smile, as Charles looked at him, with the kind, honest old expression. And so began their acquaintance, almost comically at first.

Charles don't care to talk much about that boy now. If he ever does, it is to recall his comical humorous sayings and doings in the first part of their strange friendship. He never speaks of the end, even to me.

The boy stood smiling at him, as I said, holding his long hair out of his eyes; and Charles looked on him and laughed, and forgot all about Welter and the rest of them at once.

"I want my boots cleaned," he said.

The boy said, "I can't clean they dratted top-boots. I cleaned a groom's boots a Toosday, and he punched my block because I blacked the tops. Where did that button go?"

And Charles said, "You can clean the lower part of

my boots, and do no harm. Your button is here against the lamp-post."

The boy picked it up, and got his apparatus ready. But, before he began, he looked up in Charles's face, as if he was going to speak; then he began vigorously, but in half a minute looked up again and stopped.

Charles saw that the boy liked him, and wanted to talk to him; so he began, severely,—

"How came you to be playing fives with a brass button, eh?"

The boy struck work at once, and answered, "I ain't got no ball."

"If you begin knocking stamped pieces of metal about in the street," continued Charles, "you will come to chuck-farthing; and from chuck-farthing to the gallows is a very short step indeed, I can assure you."

The boy did not seem to know whether Charles was joking or not. He cast a quick glance up at his face; but, seeing no sign of a smile there, he spat on one of his brushes, and said,—

"Not if you don't cheat, it ain't."

Charles suffered the penalty, which usually follows on talking nonsense, of finding himself in a dilemma. So he said imperiously,—

"I shall buy you a ball to-morrow; I am not going to have you knocking buttons about against people's walls in broad daylight, like that."

It was the first time that the boy had ever heard nonsense talked in his life. It was a new sensation. He

gave a sharp look up into Charles's face again, and then went on with his work.

"Where do you live, my little mannikin?" said Charles directly, in that quiet pleasant voice I know so well.

The boy did not look up this time. It was not very often, possibly, that he got spoken to so kindly by his patrons; he worked away, and answered that he lived in Marquis Court, in Southwark.

"Why do you come so far then?" asked Charles.

The boy told him why he plodded so wearily, day after day, over here in the West-end. It was for family reasons, into which I must not go too closely. Somebody, it appeared, still came home, now and then, just once in a way, to see her mother, and to visit the den where she was bred; and there was still left one who would wait for her week after week—still one pair of childish feet, bare and dirty, that would patter back beside her—still one childish voice that would prattle with her on the way to her hideous home, and call her sister.

"Have you any brothers?"

Five altogether. Jim was gone for a sojer, it appeared; and Nipper was sent over the water. Harry was on the cross—

"On the cross?" said Charles.

"Ah!" the boy said, "he goes out cly-faking and such. He's a prig, and a smart one, too. He's fly, is Harry."

"But what is cly-faking?" said Charles.

"Why a-prigging of wipes, and sneeze-boxes, and ridicules, and such."

Charles was not so ignorant of slang as not to understand what his little friend meant now. He said—

"But *you* are not a thief, are you?"

The boy looked up at him frankly and honestly, and said—

"Lord bless you, no! I shouldn't make no hand of that. I ain't brave enough for that!"

He gave the boy twopence, and gave orders that one penny was to be spent in a ball. And then he sauntered listlessly away—every day more listless, and not three weeks gone yet.

His mind returned to this child very often. He found himself thinking more about the little rogue than he could explain. The strange babble of the child, prattling so innocently, and, as he thought, so prettily, about vice, and crime, and misery; about one brother transported, one a thief—and you see he could love his sister even to the very end of it all. Strange babble indeed from a child's lips.

He thought of it again and again, and then, dressing himself plainly, he went up to Grosvenor Square, where Mary would be walking with Lord Charles Herries's children. He wanted to hear *them* talk.

He was right in his calculations; the children were there. All three of them this time; and Mary was there too. They were close to the rails, and he leant his back on them, and heard every word.

"Miss Corby," said Gus, "if Lady Ascot is such a good woman, she will go to heaven when she dies?"

"Yes, indeed, my dear," said Mary.

"And, when grandma dies, will she go to heaven, too?" said the artful Gus, knowing as well as possible that old Lady Hainault and Lady Ascot were deadly enemies.

"I hope so, my dear," said Mary.

"But does Lady Ascot hope so? Do you think grandma would be happy if—"

It became high time to stop master Gus, who was getting on too fast. Mary having bowled him out, Miss Flora had an innings.

"When I grow up," said Flora, "I shall wear knee-breeches and top-boots, and a white bull-dog, and a long clay pipe, and I shall drive into Henley on a market-day and put up at the Catherine Wheel."

Mary had breath enough left to ask her why.

"Because Farmer Thompson at Casterton dresses like that, and he is such a dear old darling. He gives us strawberries and cream; and in his garden are goose-berries and peacocks; and the peacocks' wives don't spread out their tails like their husbands do,—the foolish things. Now, when I am married—"

Gus was rude enough to interrupt her here. He remarked—

"When Archy goes to heaven, he'll want the cat to come to bed with him; and, if he can't get her, there'll be a pretty noise."

"My dears," said Mary, "you must not talk any more nonsense; I can't permit it."

"But, my dear Miss Corby," said Flora, "we haven't been talking nonsense, have we? I told you the truth about Farmer Thompson."

"I know what she means," said Gus; "we have been saying what came into our heads, and it vexes her. It is all nonsense, you know, about you wearing breeches and spreading out your tail like a peacock; we mustn't vex her."

Flora didn't answer Gus, but answered Mary by climbing on her knee and kissing her. "Tell us a story, dear," said Gus.

"What shall I tell?" said Mary.

"Tell us about Ravenshoe," said Flora; "tell us about the fishermen, and the priest that walked about like a ghost in the dark passages; and about Cuthbert Ravenshoe, who was always saying his prayers; and about the other one who won the boat race."

"Which one?" said silly Mary.

"Why, the other; the one you like best. What was his name?"

"Charles!"

How quietly and softly she said it! The word left her lips like a deep sigh. One who heard it was a gentleman still. He had heard enough, perhaps too much, and walked away towards the stable and the public-house, leaving her in the gathering gloom of the summer's evening under the red hawthorns, and labur-

nums, among the children. And, as he walked away, he thought of the night he left Ravenshoe, when the little figure was standing in the hall all alone. "She might have loved me, and I her," he said, "if the world were not out of joint; God grant it may not be so!" And, although he said, "God grant she may not," he really wished it had been so; and from this very time Mary began to take Adelaide's place in his heart.

Not that he was capable of falling in love with any woman at this time. He says he was crazy, and I believe him to a certain extent. It was a remarkably lucky thing for him that he had so diligently neglected his education. If he had not, and had found himself in his present position, with three or four times more of intellectual cravings to be satisfied, he would have gone mad, or taken to drinking. I, who write, have seen the thing happen.

But, before the crash came, I have seen Charles patiently spending the morning cutting gun-wads from an old hat, in preference to going to his books. It was this interest in trifles which saved him just now. He could think at times, and had had education enough to think logically; but his brain was not so active but that he could cut gun-wads for an hour or so; though his friend William could cut one-third more gun-wads out of an old hat than he.

He was thinking now, in his way, about these children—about Gus and Flora on the one hand, and the little shoeblack on the other. Both so innocent and

pretty, and yet so different. He had taken himself from the one world and thrown himself into the other. There were two worlds and two standards—gentlemen and non-gentlemen. The "lower orders" did not seem to be so particular about the character of their immediate relations as the upper. That was well, for he belonged to the former now, and had a sister. If one of Lord Charles Herries's children had gone wrong, Gus and Flora would never have talked of him or her to a stranger. He must learn the secret of this armour which made the poor so invulnerable. He must go and talk to the little shoeblack.

He thought that was the reason why he went to look after the little rogue next day; but that was not the real reason. The reason was, that he had found a friend in a lower grade than himself, who would admire him and look up to him. The first friend of that sort he had made since his fall. What that friend accidentally saved him from, we shall see.

CHAPTER X.

THE DERBY.

HORNBY was lying on his back on the sofa in the window, and looking out. He had sent for Charles, and Charles was standing beside him; but he had not noticed him yet. In a minute Charles said, "You sent for me, sir."

Hornby turned sharply round. "By Jove, yes," he said, looking straight at him; "Lord Welter is married."

Charles did not move a muscle, and Hornby looked disappointed. Charles only said—

"May I ask who she is, sir?"

"She is a Miss Summers. Do you know anything of her?"

Charles knew Miss Summers quite well by sight—had attended her while riding, in fact. A statement which, though strictly true, misled Hornby more than fifty lies.

"Handsome?"

"Remarkably so. Probably the handsomest (he was going to say "girl," but said "lady") I ever saw in my life."

"H'm!" and he sat silent a moment, and gave

Charles time to think. "I am glad he has married her, and before to-morrow, too."

"Well," said Hornby again, "we shall go down in the drag to-morrow. Ferrers will drive, he says. I suppose he had better; he drives better than I. Make the other two lads come in livery, but come in black trousers yourself. Wear your red waistcoat; you can button your coat over it, if it is necessary."

"Shall I wear my cockade, sir?"

"Yes; that won't matter. Can you fight?"

Charles said to himself, "I suppose we shall be in Queer-street to-morrow, then;" but he rather liked the idea. "I used to like it," said he aloud. "I don't think I care about it now. Last year, at Oxford, I and three other University men, three Pauls and a Brazenose, had a noble stramash on Folly-bridge. That is the last fighting I have seen."

"What College were you at?" said Hornby, looking out of the window; "Brazenose?"

"Paul's," said Charles, without thinking.

"Then you are the man Welter was telling me about —Charles Ravenshoe."

Charles saw it was no good to fence, and said, "Yes."

"By Jove," said Hornby, "yours is a sad story. You must have ridden out with Lady Welter more than once, I take it."

"Are you going to say anything to Lord Welter, sir?"

"Not I. I like you too well to lose you. You will stick by me, won't you?"

"I will," said Charles, "to the death. But oh, Hornby, for any sake mind those d——d bones!"

"I will. But don't be an ass: I don't play half as much as you think."

"You are playing with Welter now, sir; are you not?"

"You are a pretty dutiful sort of groom, I don't think," said Hornby, looking round and laughing good-naturedly. "What the dickens do you mean by cross-questioning me like that? Yes, I am. There—and for a noble purpose too."

Charles said no more, but was well pleased enough. If Hornby had only given him a little more of his confidence!

"I suppose," said Hornby, "if Haphazard don't win to-morrow, Lord Ascot will be a beggar."

"They say," said Charles, "that he has backed his own horse through thick and thin, sir. It is inconceivable folly; but things could not be worse at Ranford, and he stands to win some sum on the horse, as they say, which would put everything right; and the horse is favourite."

"Favourites never win," said Hornby; "and I don't think that Lord Ascot has so much on him as they say."

So, the next day, they went to the Derby. Sir Robert Ferrers of the Guards drove (this is Inkerman Bob, and he has got a patent cork leg now, and a Victoria Cross, and goes a-shooting on a grey cob); and there was Red Maclean, on furlough from India; and there was Lord Swansea, youngest of existing

Guardsmen, who blew a horn, and didn't blow it at all well; and there were two of Lieutenant Hornby's brother-officers, besides the Lieutenant: and behind, with Hornby's two grooms and our own Charles, dressed in sober black, was little Dick Ferrers, of the Home Office, who carried a peashooter, and pea-shot the noses of the leading horses of a dragful of Plungers, which followed them—which thing, had he been in the army, he wouldn't have dared to do. And the Plungers swore, and the dust flew, and the wind blew, and Sir Robert drove, and Charles laughed, and Lord Swansea gave them a little music, and away they went to the Derby.

When they came on the course, Charles and his fellow-servants had enough to do to get the horses out and see after them. After nearly an hour's absence he got back to the drag, and began to look about him.

The Plungers had drawn up behind them, and were lolling about. Before them was a family party—a fine elderly gentleman, a noble elderly lady, and two uncommonly pretty girls; and they were enjoying themselves. They were too well bred to make a noise; but there was a subdued babbling sound of laughter in that carriage, which was better music than that of a little impish German who, catching Charles's eye, played the accordion and waltzed before him, as did Salome before Herod, but with a different effect.

The carriage beyond that was a very handsome one, and in it sat a lady most beautifully dressed, alone. By the step of the carriage were a crowd of men—Hornby,

Hornby's brother-officers, Sir Robert Ferrers, and even little Dick Ferrers. Nay, there was a Plunger there; and they were all talking and laughing at the top of their voices.

Charles, goose as he was, used to be very fond of Dickens's novels. He used to say that almost everywhere in those novels you came across a sketch, may be unconnected with the story, as bold and true and beautiful as those chalk sketches of Raphael in the Taylor—scratches which, when once seen, you could never forget any more. And, as he looked at that lady in the carriage, he was reminded of one of Dickens's master-pieces in that way, out of the "Old Curiosity Shop"—of a lady sitting in a carriage all alone at the races, who bought Nell's poor flowers, and bade her go home and stay there, for God's sake.

Her back was towards him, of course; yet he guessed she was beautiful. "She is a fast woman, God help her!" said he; and he determined to go and look at her.

He sauntered past the carriage, and turned to look at her. It was Adelaide.

As faultlessly beautiful as ever, but ah—how changed! The winning petulance, so charming in other days, was gone from that face for ever. Hard, stern, proud, defiant, she sat there upright, alone. Fallen from the society of all women of her own rank, she knew—who better?—that not one of those men chattering around her would have borne to see her in the company of his

sister, viscountess though she were, countess and mother of earls as she would be. They laughed, and lounged, and joked before her; and she tolerated them, and cast her gibes hither and thither among them, bitterly and contemptuously. It was her first appearance in the world. She had been married three days. Not a woman would speak to her: Lord Welter had coarsely told her so that morning; and bitterness and hatred were in her heart. It was for this she had bartered honour and good fame. She had got her title, flung to her as a bone to a dog by Welter; but her social power, for which she had sold herself, was lower, far lower, than when she was poor Adelaide Summers.

It is right that it should be so, as a rule; in her case it was doubly right.

Charles knew all this well enough. And at the first glance at her face he knew that "the iron had entered into her soul" (I know no better expression), and he was revenged. He had ceased to love her, but revenge is sweet—to some.

Not to him. When he looked at her, he would have given his life that she might smile again, though she was no more to him what she had been. He turned, for fear of being seen, saying to himself,—

"Poor girl! Poor dear Adelaide! She must lie on the bed she has made. God help her!"

Haphazard was first favourite—*facile princeps*. He was at two and a half to one. Bill Sykes, at three and a half, was a very dangerous horse. Then came

Carnarvon, Lablache, Lickpitcher, Ivanhoe, Ben Caunt, Bath-bun, Hamlet, Allfours, and Colonel Sibthorp. The last of these was at twenty to one. Ben Caunt was to make the running for Haphazard, so they said; and Colonel Sibthorp for Bill Sykes.

So he heard the men talking round Lady Welter's carriage. Hornby's voice was as loud as any one's, and a pleasant voice it was; but they none of them talked very low. Charles could hear every word.

"I am afraid Lady Welter will never forgive me," said Hornby, "but I have bet against the favourite."

"I beg your pardon," said Adelaide.

"I have bet against your horse, Lady Welter."

"My horse?" said Adelaide, coolly and scornfully. "My horses are all post-horses, hired for the day to bring me here. I hope none of them are engaged in the races, as I shall have to go home with a pair only, and then I shall be disgraced for ever."

"I mean Haphazard."

"Oh, that horse?" said Adelaide; "that is Lord Ascot's horse, not mine. I hope you may win. You ought to win something, oughtn't you? Welter has won a great deal from you, I believe."

The facts were the other way. But Hornby said no more to her. She was glad of this, though she liked him well enough, for she hoped that she had offended him by her insolent manner. But they were at cross-purposes.

Presently Lord Welter came swinging in among

them; he looked terribly savage and wild, and Charles thought he had been drinking. Knowing what he was in this mood, and knowing also the mood Adelaide was in, he dreaded some scene. "But they cannot quarrel so soon," he thought.

"How d'ye do?" said Lord Welter to the knot of men round his wife's carriage. "Lady Welter, have your people got any champagne, or anything of that sort?"

"I suppose so; you had better ask them."

She had not forgotten what he said to her that morning so brutally. She saw he was madly angry, and would have liked to make him commit himself before these men. She had fawned, and wheedled, and flattered for a month; but now she was Lady Welter, and he should feel it.

Lord Welter looked still more savage, but said nothing. A man brought him some wine; and, as he gave it to him, Adelaide said, as quietly as though she were telling him that there was some dust on his coat,—

"You had better not take too much of it; you seem to have had enough already. Sir Robert Ferrers here is very taciturn in his cups, I am told; but you make such a terrible to-do when you are drunk."

They should feel her tongue, these fellows! They might come and dangle about her carriage-door, and joke to one another, and look on her beauty as if she were a doll; but they should feel her tongue! Charles's heart sank within him as he heard her. Only a month gone, and she desperate.

But of all the mischievous things done on that race-course that day—and they were many—the most mischievous and uncalled-for was Adelaide's attack upon Sir Robert Ferrers, who, though very young, was as sober, clever, and discreet a young man as any in the Guards, or in England. But Adelaide had heard a story about him. To wit, that, going to dinner at Greenwich with a number of friends, and having taken two glasses or so of wine at his dinner, he got it into his head that he was getting tipsy; and refused to speak another word all the evening for fear of committing himself.

The other men laughed at Ferrers. And Lord Welter chose to laugh too; he was determined that his wife should not make a fool of him. But now every one began to draw off and take their places for the race. Little Dick Ferrers, whose whole life was one long effort of good nature, stayed by Lady Welter, though horribly afraid of her, because he did not like to see her left alone. Charles forced himself into a front position against the rails, with his friend Mr. Sloane, and held on thereby, intensely interested. He was passionately fond of horse-racing; and he forgot everything, even his poor, kind old friend Lord Ascot, in scrutinising every horse as it came by from the Warren, and guessing which was to win.

Haphazard was the horse, there could be no doubt. A cheer ran all along the line, as he came walking majestically down, as though he knew he was the hero of the day. Bill Sykes and Carnarvon were as good as

good could be; but Haphazard was better. Charles remembered Lady Ascot's tearful warning about his not being able to stay; but he laughed it to scorn. The horse had furnished so since then! Here he came, flying past them like a whirlwind, shaking the earth, and making men's ears tingle with the glorious music of his feet on the turf. Haphazard, ridden by Wells, must win! Hurrah for Wells!

As the horse came slowly past again, he looked up to see the calm, stern face; but it was not there. There were Lord Ascot's colours, dark blue and white sash; but where was Wells? The jockey was a smooth-faced young man, with very white teeth, who kept grinning and touching his cap at every other word Lord Ascot said to him. Charles hurriedly borrowed Sloane's card, and read,

"Lord Ascot's Haphazard———J. Brooks."

Who, in the name of confusion, was J. Brooks? All of a sudden he remembered. It was one of Lord Ascot's own lads. It was the very lad that rode Haphazard on the day that Adelaide and he rode out to the Downs, at Ranford, to see the horse gallop. Lord Ascot must be mad.

"But Wells was to have ridden Haphazard, Mr. Sloane," said Charles.

"He wouldn't," said Sloane, and laughed sardonically. But there was no time for Charles to ask why he laughed, for the horses were off.

Those who saw the race were rather surprised that

Ben Caunt had not showed more to the front at first to force the running; but there was not much time to think of such things. As they came round the corner, Haphazard, who was lying sixth, walked through his horses and laid himself alongside of Bill Sykes. A hundred yards from the post, Bill Sykes made a push, and drew a neck a-head; in a second or so more Haphazard had passed him, winning the Derby by a clear length; and poor Lord Ascot fell headlong down in a fit, like a dead man.

Little Dicky Ferrers, in the excitement of the race, had climbed into the rumble of Adelaide's carriage, peashooter and all; and, having cheered rather noisily as the favourite came in winner, he was beginning to wonder whether he hadn't made a fool of himself, and what Lady Welter would say when she found where he had got to, when Lord Welter broke through the crowd, and came up to his wife, looking like death.

"Get home, Adelaide! You see what has happened, and know what to do. Lady Welter, if I get hold of that boy, Brooks, to-night, in a safe place, I'll murder him, by——!"

"I believe you will, Welter. Keep away from him, unless you are a madman. If you anger the boy it will all come out. Where is Lord Ascot?"

"Dead, they say, or dying. He is in a fit."

"I ought to go to him, Welter, in common decency."

"Go home, I tell you. Get the things you know of packed, and taken to one of the hotels at London

Bridge. Any name will do. Be at home to-night, dressed, in a state of jubilation; and keep a couple of hundred pounds in the house. Here, you fellows! her ladyship's horses—look sharp!"

Poor little Dicky Ferrers had heard more than he intended; but Lord Welter, in his madness, had not noticed him. He didn't use his peashooter going home, and spoke very little. There was a party of all of them in Hornby's rooms that night, and Dicky was so dull at first, that his brother made some excuse to get him by himself, and say a few eager, affectionate words to him.

"Dick, my child, you have lost some money. How much? You shall have it to-morrow."

"Not half a halfpenny, Bob; but I was with Lady Welter just after the race, and I heard more than I ought to have heard."

"You couldn't help it, I hope."

"I ought to have helped it; but it was so sudden, I couldn't help it. And now I can't ease my mind by telling anybody."

"I suppose it was some rascality of Welter's," said Sir Robert, laughing. "It don't much matter; only don't tell any one, you know." And then they went in again, and Dicky never told any one till every one knew.

For it came out soon that Lord Ascot had been madly betting, by commission, against his own horse, and that forty years' rents of his estates wouldn't set my lord on

his legs again. With his usual irresolution, he had changed his policy—partly owing, I fear, to our dear old friend Lady Ascot's perpetual croaking about "Ramoneur blood," and its staying qualities. So, after betting such a sum on his own horse as gave the betting world confidence, and excusing himself by pleading his well-known poverty from going further, he had hedged, by commission; and, could his horse have lost, he would have won enough to set matters right at Ranford. He dared not ask a great jockey to ride for him under such circumstances, and so he puffed one of his own lads to the world, and broke with Wells. The lad had sold him like a sheep. Meanwhile, thinking himself a man of honour, poor fool, he had raised every farthing possible on his estate to meet his engagements on the turf in case of failure—in case of his horse winning by some mischance, if such a thing could be. And so it came about that the men of the turf were all honourably paid, and he and his tradesmen were ruined. The estates were entailed; but for thirty years Ranford must be in the hands of strangers. Lord Welter, too, had raised money, and lost fearfully by the same speculation.

There are some men who are always in the right place when they are wanted—always ready to do good and kind actions—and who are generally found "to the fore" in times of trouble. Such a man was General Mainwaring. When Lord Ascot fell down in a fit, he was beside him, and, having seen him doing well, and

having heard from him, as he recovered, the fearful extent of the disaster, he had posted across country to Ranford and told Lady Ascot.

She took it very quietly.

"Win or lose," she said, "it is all one to this unhappy house. Tell them to get out my horses, dear general, and let me go to my poor darling Ascot. You have heard nothing of Charles Ravenshoe, general?"

"Nothing, my dear lady."

Charles had brushed his sleeve in the crowd that day, and had longed to take the dear old brown hand in his again, but dared not. Poor Charles! If he had only done so!

So the general and Lady Ascot went off together, and nursed Lord Ascot; and Adelaide, pale as death, but beautiful as ever, was driven home through the dust and turmoil, clenching her hands impatiently together at every stoppage on the road.

CHAPTER XI.

LORD WELTER'S MÉNAGE.

THERE was a time, a time we have seen, when Lord Welter was a merry, humorous, thoughtless boy. A boy, one would have said, with as little real mischief in him as might be. He might have made a decent member of society, who knows? But, to do him justice, he had had everything against him from his earliest childhood. He had never known what a mother was, or a sister. His earliest companions were grooms and gamekeepers; and his religious instruction was got mostly from his grandmother, whose old-fashioned Sunday-morning lectures and collect learnings, so rigidly pursued that he dreaded Sunday of all days in the week, were succeeded by cock-fighting in the Croft with his father in the afternoon, and lounging away the evening among the stable-boys. As Lord Saltire once said, in a former part of this story, "Ranford was what the young men of the day called an uncommon fast house."

Fast enough, in truth. "All downhill and no drag on." Welter soon defied his grandmother. For his father he cared nothing. Lord Ascot was so foolishly fond of the boy that he never contradicted him in anything, and

used even to laugh when he was impudent to his grandmother, whom, to do Lord Ascot justice, he respected more than any living woman. Tutors were tried, of whom Welter, by a happy combination of obstinacy and recklessness, managed to vanquish three, in as many months. It was hopeless. Lord Ascot would not hear of his going to school. He was his only boy, his darling. He could not part with him; and, when Lady Ascot pressed the matter, he grew obstinate, as he could at times, and said he would not. The boy would do well enough; he had been just like him at his age, and look at him now!

Lord Ascot was mistaken. He had not been quite like Lord Welter at his age. He had been a very quiet sort of boy indeed. Lord Ascot was a great stickler for blood in horses, and understood such things. I wonder he could not have seen the difference between the sweet, loving face of his mother, capable of violent, furious passion though it was, and that of his coarse, stupid, handsome, gipsy-looking wife, and judged accordingly. He had engrafted a new strain of blood on the old Staunton stock, and was to reap the consequences.

What was to become of Lord Welter was a great problem, still unsolved; when, one night, shortly before Charles paid his first visit to Ranford, vice Cuthbert, disapproved of, Lord Ascot came up, as his custom was, into his mother's dressing-room, to have half-an-hour's chat with her before she went to bed.

"I wonder, mother dear," he said, "whether I ought

to ask old Saltire again, or not? He wouldn't come last time, you know. If I thought he wouldn't come, I'd ask him."

"You must ask him," said Lady Ascot, brushing her grey hair, "and he will come."

"*Very* well," said Lord Ascot. "It's a bore; but you must have some one to flirt with, I suppose."

Lady Ascot laughed. In fact, she had written before, and told him that he *must* come, for she wanted him; and come he did.

"Now, Maria," said Lord Saltire, on the first night, as soon as he and Lady Ascot were seated together on a quiet sofa, "what is it? Why have you brought me down to meet this mob of jockeys and gamekeepers? A fortnight here, and not a soul to speak to, but Mainwaring and yourself. After I was here last time, dear old Lady Hainault croaked out in a large crowd that some one smelt of the stable.

"Dear old soul," said Lady Ascot. "What a charming, delicate wit she has. You will have to come here again, though. Every year, mind."

"Kismet," said Lord Saltire. "But what is the matter?"

"What do you think of Ascot's boy?"

"Oh, Lord!" said Lord Saltire. "So I have been brought all this way to be consulted about a schoolboy. Well, I think he looks an atrocious young cub, as like his dear mamma as he can be. I always used to expect that she would call me a pretty gentleman, and want to tell my fortune."

Lady Ascot smiled: *she* knew her man. She knew he would have died for her and hers.

"He is getting very troublesome," said Lady Ascot. "What would you reco—"

"Send him to Eton," said Lord Saltire.

"But he is very high-spirited, James, and—"

"*Send him to Eton.* Do you hear, Maria?"

"But Ascot won't let him go," said Lady Ascot.

"Oh, he won't, won't he?" said Lord Saltire. "Now, let us hear no more of the cub, but have our picquet in peace."

The next morning Lord Saltire had an interview with Lord Ascot, and two hours afterwards it was known that Lord Welter was to go to Eton at once.

And so, when Lord Welter met Charles at Twyford, he told him of it.

At Eton, he had rapidly found other boys brought up with the same tastes as himself, and with these he consorted. A rapid interchange of experiences went on among these young gentlemen; which ended in Lord Welter, at all events, being irreclaimably vicious.

Lord Welter had fallen in love with Charles, as boys do, and their friendship had lasted on, waning as it went, till they permanently met again at Oxford. There, though their intimacy was as close as ever, the old love died out, for a time, amidst riot and debauchery. Charles had some sort of a creed about women; Lord Welter had none. Charles drew a line at a certain point, low down it might be, which he never passed; Welter set no

bounds anywhere. What Lord Hainault said of him at Tattersall's was true. One day, when they had been arguing on this point rather sharply, Charles said—

"If you mean what you say, you are not fit to come into a gentleman's house. But you don't mean it, old cock; so don't be an ass."

He did mean it, and Charles was right. Alas! that ever he should have come to Ravenshoe!

Lord Welter had lived so long in the house with Adelaide that he never thought of making love to her. They used to quarrel, like Benedict and Beatrice. What happened was her fault. She was worthless. Worthless. Let us have done with it. I can expand over Lord Saltire and Lady Ascot, and such good people, but I cannot over her, more than is necessary.

Two things Lord Welter was very fond of—brawling and dicing. He was an arrant bully; very strong, and perfect in the use of his fists, and of such courage and tenacity that, having once begun a brawl, no one had ever made him leave it, save as an unqualified victor. This was getting well known now. Since he had left Oxford and had been living in London, he had been engaged in two or three personal encounters in the terribly fast society to which he had betaken himself, and men were getting afraid of him. Another thing was, that, drink as he would, he never played the worse for it. He was a lucky player. Sometimes, after winning money of a man, he would ask him home to have his revenge. That man generally went again and again to Lord Welter's house,

in St. John's Wood, and did not find himself any the richer. It was the most beautiful little gambling den in London, and it was presided over by one of the most beautiful, witty, fascinating women ever seen. A woman with whom all the men fell in love; so staid, so respectable, and charmingly behaved. Lord Welter always used to call her Lady Welter; so they all called her Lady Welter too, and treated her as though she were.

But this Lady Welter was soon to be dethroned to make room for Adelaide. A day or two before they went off together, this poor woman got a note from Welter to tell her to prepare for a new mistress. It was no blow to her. He had prepared her for it for some time. There might have been tears, wild tears, in private; but what cared he for the tears of such an one? When Lord Welter and Adelaide came home, and Adelaide came with him into the hall, she advanced towards her, dressed as a waiting-woman, and said quietly,

"You are welcome home, madam."

It was Ellen, and Lord Welter was the delinquent, as you have guessed already. When she fled from Ravenshoe, she was flying from the anger of her supposed brother William; for he thought he knew all about it; and, when Charles and Marston saw her passing round the cliff, she was making her weary way on foot towards Exeter to join him in London. After she was missed, William had written to Lord Welter, earnestly begging him to tell him if he had heard of her. And Welter

had written back to him that he knew nothing, on his honour. Alas for Welter's honour, and William's folly in believing him!

Poor Ellen! Lord Welter had thought that she would have left the house, and had good reason for thinking so. But, when he got home, there she was. All her finery cast away, dressed plainly and quietly. And there she stayed, waiting on Adelaide, demure and quiet as a waiting-woman should be. Adelaide had never been to Ravenshoe, and did not know her. Lord Welter had calculated on her going; but she stayed on. Why?

You must bear with me, indeed you must, at such times as these. I touch as lightly as I can; but I have undertaken to tell a story, and I must tell it. These things are going on about us, and we try to ignore them, till they are thrust rudely upon us, as they are twenty times a year. No English story about young men could be complete without bringing in subjects which some may think best left alone. Let us comfort ourselves with one great, undeniable fact,—the immense improvement in morals which has taken place in the last ten years. The very outcry which is now raised against such relations shows plainly one thing at least—that undeniable facts are being winked at no longer, and that some reform is coming. Every younger son who can command 200*l.* a year ought to be allowed to marry in his own rank in life, whatever that may be. They will be uncomfortable, and have to save and push; and

a very good thing for them. They won't lose caste. There are some things worse than mere discomfort. Let us look at bare facts, which no one dare deny. There is in the great world, and the upper middle-class world too, a crowd of cadets; younger sons, clerks, officers in the army, and so on; non-marrying men, as the slang goes, who are asked out to dine and dance with girls who are their equals in rank, and who have every opportunity of falling in love with them. And yet if one of this numerous crowd were to dare to fall in love with, and to propose to, one of these girls, he would be denied the house. It is the fathers and mothers who are to blame, to a great extent, for the very connexions they denounce so loudly. But yet the very outcry they are raising against these connexions is a hopeful sign.

Lieutenant Hornby, walking up and down the earth to see what mischief he could get into, had done a smart stroke of business in that way, by making the acquaintance of Lord Welter at a gambling-house. Hornby was a very good fellow. He had two great pleasures in life. One, I am happy to say, was soldiering, at which he worked like a horse, and the other, I am very sorry to say, was gambling, at which he worked a great deal harder than he should. He was a marked man among professional players. Every one knew how awfully rich he was, and every one in succession had a "shy" at him. He was not at all particular. He would accept a battle with any one. Gaming men did all sorts

of dirty things to get introduced to him, and play with him. The greater number of them had their wicked will; but the worst of it was, that he always won. Sometimes, at a game of chance, he might lose enough to encourage his enemies to go on; but at games of skill no one could touch him. His billiard playing was simply masterly. And Dick Ferrers will tell you, that he and Hornby, being once, I am very sorry to say, together at G—n—ch F—r, were accosted in the park by a skittle-sharper, and that Hornby (who would, like Faust, have played chess with Old Gooseberry) allowed himself to be taken into a skittle-ground, from which he came out in half an hour victorious over the skittle-sharper, beating him easily.

In the heyday of his fame, Lord Welter was told of him, and saying, "Give me the daggers," got introduced to him. They had a tournament at *écarté*, or billiards, or something or another of that sort, it don't matter; and Lord Welter asked him up to St. John's Wood, where he saw Ellen.

He lost that night liberally, as he could afford to; and, with very little persuasion, was induced to come there the next. He lost liberally again. He had fallen in love with Ellen.

Lord Welter saw it, and made use of it as a bait to draw on Hornby to play. Ellen's presence was, of course, a great attraction to him, and he came and played; but unluckily for Lord Welter, after a few nights his luck changed, or he took more care, and he began to

win again; so much so that, about the time when Adelaide came home, my Lord Welter had had nearly enough of Lieutenant Hornby, and was in hopes that he should have got rid of Ellen and him together; for his lordship was no fool about some things, and saw plainly this—that Hornby was passionately fond of Ellen, and, moreover, that poor Ellen had fallen deeply in love with Hornby.

So, when he came home, he was surprised and angry to find her there. She would not go. She would stay and wait on Adelaide. She had been asked to go; but had refused sharply the man she loved. Poor girl, she had her reasons; and we shall see what they were. Now you know what I meant when I wondered whether or no Charles would have burnt Hornby's house down if he had known all. But you will be rather inclined to forgive Hornby presently, as Charles did when he came to know everything.

But the consequence of Ellen's staying on as servant to Adelaide brought this with it, that Hornby determined that he would have the *entrée* of the house in St. John's Wood, at any price. Lord Welter guessed this, and guessed that Hornby would be inclined to lose a little money in order to gain it. When he brushed Charles's knee in Piccadilly he was deliberating whether or no he should ask him back there again. As he stood unconsciously, almost touching Charles, he came to the determination that he would try what bargain he could make with the honour of Charles's sister, whom he had so shamefully injured

already. And Charles saw them make the appointment together in the balcony. How little he guessed for what!

Lord Hainault was right. Welter was a scoundrel. But Hornby was not, as we shall see.

Hornby loved play for play's sake. And, extravagant dandy though he was, the attorney blood of his father came out sometimes so strong in him that, although he would have paid any price to be near, and speak to Ellen, yet he could not help winning, to Lord Welter's great disgust, and his own great amusement. Their game, I believe, was generally *picquet* or *écarté*, and at both these he was Lord Welter's master. What with his luck and his superior play, it was very hard to lose decently sometimes; and sometimes, as I said, he would cast his plans to the winds, and win terribly. But he always repented when he saw Lord Welter get savage, and lost dutifully, though at times he could barely keep his countenance. Nevertheless the balance he allowed to Lord Welter made a very important item in that gentleman's somewhat precarious income.

But, in spite of all his sacrifices, he but rarely got even a glimpse of Ellen. And, to complicate matters, Adelaide, who sat by and watched the play, and saw Hornby purposely losing at times, got it into her silly head that he was in love with her. She liked the man; who did not? But she had honour enough left to be rude to him. Hornby saw all this, and was amused. I often think that it must have been a fine spectacle, to see the honourable man playing with the scoundrel, and

giving him just as much line as he chose. And, when I call Hornby an honourable man, I mean what I say, as you will see.

This was the state of things when the Derby crash came. At half-past five on that day the Viscountess Welter dashed up to her elegant residence in St. John's Wood, in a splendid barouche, drawn by four horses, and when "her people" came and opened the door and let down the steps, lazily descended, and, followed by her footman bearing her fal-lals, lounged up the steps as if life were really too ennuyant to be born any longer. Three hours afterwards, a fierce eager woman, plainly dressed, with a dark veil, was taking apartments in the Bridge Hotel, London Bridge, for Mr. and Mrs. Staunton, who were going abroad in a few days; and was overseeing, with her confidential servant, a staid man in black, the safe stowage of numerous hasped oak boxes, the most remarkable thing about which, was their great weight. The lady was Lady Welter, and the man was Lord Welter's confidential scoundrel. The landlord thought they had robbed Hunt and Roskell's, and were off with the plunder, till he overheard the man say, "I think that is all, my lady;" after which he was quite satisfied. The fact was that all the Ascot race plate, gold salvers and épergnes, silver cups rough with designs of the chase, and possibly also some of the Ascot family jewels, were so disgusted with the state of things in England, that they were thinking of going for a little trip on the Continent. What should a dutiful wife do

but see to their safe stowage? If any enterprising burglar had taken it into his head to "crack" that particular "crib" known as the Bridge Hotel, and got clear off with the "swag," he might have retired on the hard-earned fruits of a well-spent life, into happier lands—might have been "run" for M.L.C., or possibly for Congress in a year or two. Who can tell?

And, also, if Lord Welter's confidential scoundrel had taken it into his head to waylay and rob his lordship's noble consort on her way home—which he was quite capable of doing—and if he also had got clear off, he would have found himself a better man by seven hundred and ninety-four pounds, three half-crowns, and a three-penny piece; that is, if he had done it before her ladyship had paid the cabman. But both the burglars and the valet missed the tide, and the latter regrets it to this day.

At eleven o'clock that night Lady Welter was lolling leisurely on her drawing-room sofa, quite bored to death. When Lord Welter, and Hornby, and Sir Robert Ferrers, and some Dragoons came in, she was yawning, as if life was really too much of a plague to be endured. Would she play loo? Oh, yes; anything after such a wretched, lonely evening. That was the game where you had three cards, wasn't it, and you needn't go on unless you liked? Would Welter or some one lend her some money? She had got a three-penny piece and a shilling somewhere or another, but that would not be enough, she supposed. Where was Sir Robert's little brother?

Gone to bed? How tiresome; she had fallen in love with him, and had set her heart on seeing him to-night; and so on.

Lord Welter gave her a key, and told her there was some money in his dressing-case. As she left the room, Hornby, who was watching them, saw a quick look of intelligence pass between them, and laughed in his sleeve.

I have been given to understand that guinea unlimited loo is a charming pursuit, soothing to the feelings, and highly improving to the moral tone. I speak from hearsay, as circumstances over which I have no control have prevented my ever trying it. But this I know—that, if Lord Welter's valet had robbed his master and mistress when they went to bed that night; instead of netting seven hundred and ninety-four, seven, nine, he would have netted eleven hundred and forty-six, eight, six; leaving out the three-penny-piece. But he didn't do it; and Lord and Lady Welter slept that sleep which is the peculiar reward of a quiet conscience, undisturbed.

But, next morning, when Charles waited on Hornby in his dressing-room, the latter said—

"I shall want you to-night, lad. I thought I might have last night; but, seeing the other fellows went, I left you at home. Be ready at half-past six. I lost a hundred and twenty pounds last night. I don't mean to afford it any longer. I shall stop it."

"Where are we to go to, sir?"

"To St. John's Wood. We shall be up late. Leave the servant's hall, and come up and lie in the hall as if you were asleep. Don't let yourself be seen. No one will notice you."

Charles little thought where he was going.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HOUSE FULL OF GHOSTS.

CHARLES had really no idea where he was going. Although he knew that Hornby had been playing with Lord Welter, yet he thought, from what Hornby had said, that he would not bring him into collision with him; and indeed he did not—only taking Charles with him as a reserve in case of accidents, for he thoroughly distrusted his lordship.

At half-past six in the evening Hornby rode slowly away, followed by Charles. He had told Charles that he should dine in St. John's Wood at seven, and should ride there, and Charles was to wait with the horses. But it was nearly seven, and yet Hornby loitered, and seemed undetermined. It was a wild, gusty evening, threatening rain. There were very few people abroad, and those who were rode or walked rapidly. And yet Hornby dawdled irresolute, as though his determination were hardly strong enough yet.

At first he rode quite away from his destination, but by degrees his horse's head got changed into the right direction; then he made another detour, but a shorter one; at last he put spurs to his horse, and rode reso-

lutely up the short carriage-drive before the door, and, giving the reins to Charles, walked firmly in.

Charles put up the horses, and went into the servants' hall, or the room which answered that end in the rather small house of Lord Welter. No one was there. All the servants were busy with the dinner, and Charles was left unnoticed.

By and by a page, noticing a strange servant in passing the door, brought him some beer, and a volume of the Newgate Calendar. This young gentleman called his attention to a print of a lady cutting up the body of her husband with a chopper, assisted by a young Jew, who was depicted "walking off with a leg," like one of the Fans (the use of which seems to be, to cool the warm imagination of other travellers into proper limits), while the woman was preparing for another effort. After having recommended Charles to read the letterpress thereof, as he would find it tolerably spicy, he departed, and left him alone.

The dinner was got over in time; and after a time there was silence in the house—a silence so great that Charles rose and left the room. He soon found his way to another; but all was dark and silent, though it was not more than half-past nine.

He stood in the dark passage, wondering where to go, and determined to turn back to the room from which he had come. There was a light there, at all events.

There was a light, and the Newgate Calendar. The wild wind, that had eddied and whirled the dust at the

street corners, and swept across the park all day, had gone down, and the rain had come on. He could hear it, drip, drip, outside; it was very melancholy. Confound the Newgate Calendar!

He was in a very queer house, he knew. What did Hornby mean by asking him the night before whether or no he could fight, and whether he would stick to him? Drip, drip; otherwise a dead silence. Charles's heart began to beat a little faster.

Where were all the servants? He had heard plenty of them half an hour ago. He had heard a French cook swearing at English kitchen-girls, and had heard plenty of other voices; and now—the silence of the grave. Or of Christie and Manson's on Saturday evening; or of the Southern Indian Ocean in a calm at midnight; or of anything else you like; similes are cheap.

He remembered now that Hornby had said, "Come and lie in the hall as if asleep; no one will notice you." He determined to do so. But where was it? His candle was flickering in its socket, and, as he tried to move it, it went out.

He could scarcely keep from muttering an oath, but he did. His situation was very uncomfortable. He did not know in what house he was—only that he was in a quarter of the town in which there were not a few uncommonly queer houses. He determined to grope his way to the light.

He felt his way out of the room and along a passage. The darkness was intense, and the silence perfect.

Suddenly a dull red light gleamed in his eyes, and made him start. It was the light of the kitchen fire. A cricket would have been company, but there was none.

He continued to advance cautiously. Soon a ghostly square of very dim grey light on his left showed him where was a long narrow window. It was barred with iron bars. He was just thinking of this, and how very queer it was, when he uttered a loud oath, and came crashing down. He had fallen upstairs.

He had made noise enough to waken the seven sleepers; but those gentlemen did not seem to be in the neighbourhood, or, at all events, if awakened, gave no sign of it. Dead silence. He sat on the bottom stair and rubbed his shins, and, in spite of a strong suspicion that he had got into a scrape, laughed to himself at the absurdity of his position.

"Would it be worth while, I wonder," he said to himself, "to go back to the kitchen and get the poker? I'd better not, I suppose. It would be so deuced awkward to be caught in the dark with a poker in your hand. Being on the premises for the purpose of committing a felony—that is what they would say; and then they would be sure to say that you were the companion of thieves, and had been convicted before. No. Under this staircase, in the nature of things, is the housemaid's cupboard. What should I find there as a weapon of defence? A dust-pan. A great deal might be done with a dust-pan, mind you, at close quarters. How would it do to arrange all her paraphernalia on

the stairs, and cry fire, so that mine enemies, rushing forth, might stumble and fall, and be taken unawares? But that would be acting on the offensive, and I have no safe grounds for pitching into anyone yet."

Though Charles tried to comfort himself by talking nonsense, he was very uncomfortable. Staying where he was, was intolerable; and he hardly dared ascend into the upper regions unbidden. Besides, he had fully persuaded himself that a disturbance was imminent, and, though a brave man, did not like to precipitate it. He had mistaken the character of the house he was in. At last, taking heart, he turned and felt his way upstairs. He came before a door through the keyhole of which the light streamed strongly; he was deliberating whether to open it or not, when a shadow crossed it, though he heard no noise, but a minute after the distant sound of a closing door. He could stand it no longer. He opened the door, and advanced into a blaze of light.

He entered a beautiful flagged hall, frescoed and gilded. There were vases of flowers round the walls, and strips of Indian matting on the pavement. It was lit by a single chandelier, which was reflected in four great pier-glasses reaching to the ground, in which Charles's top-boots and brown face were reduplicated most startingly. The *tout ensemble* was very beautiful; but what struck Charles, was the bad taste of having an entrance-hall decorated like a drawing-room. "That is just the sort of thing they do in these places," he thought.

There were only two hats on the entrance table; one of which he was rejoiced to recognise as that of his most respected master. "May the deuce take his silly noddle for bringing me to such a place!" thought Charles.

This was evidently the front hall spoken of by Hornby; and he remembered his advice to pretend to go to sleep. So he lay down on three hall-chairs, and put his hat over his eyes.

Hall-chairs are hard; and, although Charles had just been laughing at the proprietor of the house for being so lavish in his decorations, he now wished that he had carried out his system a little further, and had cushions to his chairs. But no; the chairs were *de rigueur*, with crests on the backs of them. Charles did not notice whose.

If a man pretends to go to sleep, and, like the Marchioness with her orange-peel and water, "makes believe very much," he may sometimes succeed in going to sleep in good earnest. Charles imitated the thing so well, that in five minutes he was as fast off as a top.

Till a night or two before this, Charles had never dreamt of Ravenshoe since he had left it. When the first sharp sting of his trouble was in his soul, his mind had refused to go back farther than to the events of a day or so before. He had dreamt long silly dreams of his master, or his fellow-servants, or his horses, but always, all through the night, with a dread on him of waking in the dark. But, as his mind began to settle

and his pain got dulled, he began to dream about Ravenshoe, and Oxford, and Shrewsbury again; and he no longer dreaded the waking as he did, for the reality of his life was no longer hideous to him. With the fatal "plasticity" of his nature, he had lowered himself, body and soul, to the level of it.

But to-night, as he slept on these chairs, he dreamt of Ravenshoe, and of Cuthbert, and of Ellen. And he woke, and she was standing within ten feet of him, under the chandelier.

He was awake in an instant, but he lay as still as a mouse, staring at her. She had not noticed him, but was standing in profound thought. Found, and so soon! His sister! How lovely she was, standing, dressed in light pearl grey, like some beautiful ghost, with her speaking eyes fixed on nothing. She moved now, but so lightly that her footfall was barely heard upon the matting. Then she turned and noticed him. She did not seem surprised at seeing a groom stretched out asleep on the chairs—she was used to that sort of thing probably—but she turned away, gliding through a door at the further end of the hall, and was gone.

Charles's heart was leaping and beating madly, but he heard another door open, and lay still.

Adelaide came out of a door opposite to the one into which Ellen had passed. Charles was not surprised. He was beyond surprise. But, when he saw her and Ellen in the same house, in one instant, with the quickness of lightning, he understood it all. It was

Welter had tempted Ellen from Ravenshoe! Fool! fool! he might have prevented it once if he had only guessed.

If he had any doubt as to where he was now, it was soon dispelled. Lord Welter came rapidly out of the door after Adelaide, and called her in a whisper, "Adelaide."

"Well," she said, turning round sharply.

"Come back, do you hear?" said Lord Welter. "Where the deuce are you going?"

"To my own room."

"Come back, I tell you," said Lord Welter savagely, in a low voice. "You are going to spoil everything with your confounded airs."

"I shall not come back. I am not going to act as a decoy-duck to that man, or any other man. Let me go, Welter."

Lord Welter was very near having to let her go with a vengeance. Charles was ready for a spring, but watched, and waited his time. Lord Welter had only caught her firmly by the wrist to detain her. He was not hurting her.

"Look you here, my Lady Welter," he said slowly and distinctly. "Listen to what I've got to say, and don't try the shadow of a tantrum with me, for I won't have it for one moment. I don't mind your chaff and nonsense in public; it blinds people, it is racy and attracts people; but in private I am master, do you hear? Master. You know you are afraid of me, and

have good cause to be, by Jove. You are shaking now. Go back to that room."

"I won't, I won't, I won't. Not without you, Welter. How can you use me so cruelly, Welter? Oh, Welter, how can you be such a villain?"

"You conceited fool," said Lord Welter contemptuously. "Do you think he wants to make love to you?"

"You know he does, Welter; you know it," said Adelaide passionately.

Lord Welter laughed good-naturedly. (He could be good-natured.) He drew her towards him and kissed her. "My poor little girl," he said, "if I thought that, I would break his neck. But it is utterly wide of the truth. Look here, Adelaide; you are as safe from insult as my wife, as you were at Ranford. What you are not safe from is my own temper. Let us be friends in private and not squabble so much, eh? You are a good shrewd, clever wife to me. Do keep your tongue quiet. Come in and mark what follows."

They had not noticed Charles, though he had been so sure that they would, that he had got his face down on the chair, covered with his arms, feigning sleep. When they went into the room again, Charles caught hold of a coat which was on the back of a chair, and, curling himself up, put it over him. He would listen, listen, listen for every word. He had a right to listen now.

In a minute a bell rang twice. Almost at the same moment some one came out of the door through which

Lord Welter had passed, and stood silent. In about two minutes another door opened, and some one else came into the hall.

A woman's voice—Ellen's—said, "Oh, are you come again?"

A man's voice—Lieutenant Hornby's—said in answer, "You see I am. I got Lady Welter to ring her bell twice for you, and then to stay in that room, so that I might have an interview with you."

"I am obliged to her ladyship. She must have been surprised that I was the object of attraction. She fancied herself so."

"She was surprised. And she was more so, when I told her what my real object was."

"Indeed," said Ellen bitterly. "But her ladyship's surprise does not appear to have prevented her from assisting you."

"On the contrary," said Hornby, "she wished me God speed—her own words."

"Sir, you are a gentleman. Don't disgrace yourself and me—if I can be disgraced—by quoting that woman's blasphemy before me. Sir, you have had your answer. I shall go."

"Ellen, you must stay. I have got this interview with you to-night, to ask you to be my wife. I love you as I believe woman was never loved before, and I ask you to be my wife."

"You madman! you madman!"

"I am no madman. I was a madman when I spoke

to you before; I pray your forgiveness for that. You must forget that. I say that I love you as a woman was never loved before. Shall I say something more, Ellen?"

"Say on."

"You love me."

"I love you as man was never loved before; and I swear to you that I hope I may lie stiff and cold in my unhonoured coffin, before I'll ruin the man I love, by tying him to such a wretch as myself."

"Ellen, Ellen, don't say that. Don't take such vows, which you will not dare to break afterwards. Think, you may regain all that you have lost, and marry a man who loves you—ah, so dearly!—and whom you love too."

"Ay; there's the rub. If I did not love you, I would marry you to-morrow. Regain all I have lost, say you? Bring my mother to life again, for instance, or walk among other women again as an honest one? You talk nonsense, Mr. Hornby—nonsense. I am going."

"Ellen! Ellen! Why do you stay in this house? Think once again."

"I shall never leave thinking; but my determination is the same. I tell you, as a desperate woman like me dare tell you, that I love you far too well to ruin your prospects, and I love my own soul too well ever to make another false step. I stayed in this house because I loved to see you now and then, and hear your voice; but now I shall leave it."

"See me once more, Ellen—only once more!"

"I will see you once more. I will tear my heart once more, if you wish it. You have deserved all I can do for you, God knows. Come here the day after to-morrow; but come without hope, mind. A woman who has been through what I have can trust herself. Do you know that I am a Catholic?"

"No."

"I am. Would you turn Catholic if I were to marry you?"

God forgive poor Hornby! He said, "Yes." What will not men say at such times?

"Did I not say you were a madman? Do you think I would ruin you in the next world, as well as in this? Go away, sir; and, when your children are round you, humbly bless God's mercy for saving you, body and soul, this night."

"I shall see you again?"

"Come here the day after to-morrow; but come without hope."

She passed through the door, and left him standing alone. Charles rose from his lair, and, coming up to him, laid his hand on his shoulder.

"You have heard all this," said poor Hornby.

"Every word," said Charles. "I had a right to listen, you know. She is my sister."

"Your sister?"

Then Charles told him all. Hornby had heard enough from Lord Welter to understand it.

"Your sister! Can you help me, Horton? Surely she will hear reason from you. Will you persuade her to listen to me?"

"No," said Charles. "She was right. You are mad. I will not help you do an act which you would bitterly repent all your life. You must forget her. She and I are disgraced, and must get away somewhere, and hide our shame together."

What Hornby would have answered, no man can tell; for at this moment Adelaide came out of the room, and passed quickly across the hall, saying good night to him as she passed. She did not recognise Charles, or seem surprised at seeing Hornby talking to his groom. Nobody who had lived in Lord Welter's house a day or two was surprised at anything.

But Charles, speaking to Hornby more as if he were master than servant, said, "Wait here;" and, stepping quickly from him, went into the room where Lord Welter sat alone, and shut the door. Hornby heard it locked behind him, and waited in the hall, listening intensely, for what was to follow.

"There'll be a row directly," said Hornby to himself; "and that chivalrous fool, Charles, has locked himself in. I wish Welter did not send all his servants out of the house at night. There'll be murder done here some day."

He listened and heard voices, low as yet—so low that he could hear the dripping of the rain outside. Drip—drip! The suspense was intolerable. When would they be at one another's throats?

CHAPTER XIII.

CHARLES'S EXPLANATION WITH LORD WELTER.

THERE is a particular kind of Ghost or Devil, which is represented by an isosceles triangle (more or less correctly drawn) for the body; straight lines turned up at the ends for legs; straight lines divided into five at the ends for arms; a round O, with arbitrary dots for the features, for a head; with a hat, an umbrella, and a pipe. Drawn like this, it is a sufficiently terrible object. But, if you take an ace of clubs, make the club represent the head, add horns, and fill in the body and limbs as above, in deep black, with the feather end of the pen, it becomes simply appalling, and will strike terror into the stoutest heart.

Is this the place, say you, for talking such nonsense as this? If you must give us balderdash of this sort, could not you do so in a chapter with a less terrible heading than this one has? And I answer, Why not let me tell my story my own way? Something depends even on this nonsense of making devils out of the ace of clubs.

It was rather a favourite amusement of Charles's and Lord Welter's, in old times at Ranford. They used, on rainy afternoons, to collect all the old aces of clubs

(and there were always plenty of them to be had in that house, God help it), and make devils out of them, each one worse than the first. And now, when Charles had locked the door, and advanced softly up to Welter, he saw, over his shoulder, that he had got an ace of clubs, and the pen and ink, and was making a devil.

It was a trifling circumstance enough, perhaps; but there was enough of old times in it to alter the tone in which Charles said, "Welter," as he laid his hand on his shoulder.

Lord Welter was a bully; but he was as brave as a lion, with nerves of steel. He neither left off his drawing, nor looked up; he only said—"Charley boy, come and sit down till I have finished this fellow. Get an ace of clubs, and try your own hand. I am out of practice."

Perhaps even Lord Welter might have started when he heard Charles's voice, and felt his hand on his shoulder; but he had had one instant—only one instant—of preparation. When he heard the key turn in the door, he had looked in a pier-glass opposite to him, and seen who and what was coming, and then gone on with his employment. Even allowing for this moment's preparation, we must give him credit for the nerve of one man in ten thousand; for the apparition of Charles Ravenshoe was as unlooked for as that of any one of Charles Ravenshoe's remote ancestors.

You see, I call him Charles Ravenshoe still. It is a trick. You must excuse it.

Charles did not sit down and draw devils; he said, in a quiet mournful tone,

"Welter, Welter, why have you been such a villain?"

Lord Welter found that a difficult question to answer. He let it alone, and said nothing.

"I say nothing about Adelaide. You did not use me well there; for, when you persuaded her to go off with you, you had not heard of my ruin."

"On my soul, Charles, there was not much persuasion wanted there."

"Very likely. I do not want to speak about that, but about Ellen, my sister. Was anything ever done more shamefully than that?"

Charles expected some furious outbreak when he said that. None came. What was good in Lord Welter came to the surface, when he saw his old friend and playmate there before him, sunk so far below him in all that this world considers worth having, but rising so far above him in his fearless honour and manliness. He was humbled, sorry, and ashamed. Bitter as Charles's words were, he felt they were true, and had manhood enough left to not resent them. To the sensation of fear, as I have said before, Lord Welter was a total stranger, or he might have been nervous at being locked up in a room alone, with a desperate man, physically his equal, whom he had so shamefully wronged. He rose and leant against the chimney-piece, looking at Charles.

"I did not know she was your sister, Charles. You must do me that justice."

"Of course you did not. If—"

"I know what you are going to say—that I should not have dared. On my soul, Charles, I don't know; I believe I dare do anything. But I tell you one thing—of all the men who walk this earth, you are the last I would willingly wrong. When I went off with Adelaide, I knew she did not care sixpence for you. I knew she would have made you wretched. I knew better than you, because I never was in love with her, and you were, what a heartless ambitious jade it was! She sold herself to me for the title I gave her, as she had tried to sell herself to that solemn prig, Hainault, before. And I bought her, because a handsome, witty, clever wife is a valuable chattel to a man like me, who has to live by his wits."

"Ellen was as handsome and as clever as she. Why did not you marry her?" said Charles bitterly.

"If you will have the real truth, Ellen would have been Lady Welter now, but—"

Lord Welter hesitated. He was a great rascal, and he had a brazen front, but he found a difficulty in going on. It must be, I should fancy, very hard work to tell all the little ins and outs of a piece of villany one has been engaged in, and to tell, as Lord Welter did on this occasion, the exact truth.

"I am waiting," said Charles, "to hear you tell me why she was not made Lady Welter."

"What, you will have it then? Well, she was too scrupulous. She was too honourable a woman for this

line of business. She wouldn't play, or learn to play—d—n it, sir, you have got the whole truth now, if that will content you."

"I believe what you say, my lord. Do you know that Lieutenant Hornby made her an offer of marriage to-night?"

"I supposed he would," said Lord Welter.

"And that she has refused him?"

"I guessed that she would. She is your own sister. Shall you try to persuade her?"

"I would see her in her coffin first."

"So I suppose."

"She must come away from here, Lord Welter. I must keep her and do what I can for her. We must pull through it together somehow."

"She had better go from here. She is too good for this hole. I must make provision for her to live with you."

"Not one halfpenny, my lord. She has lived too long in dependence and disgrace already. We will pull through together alone."

Lord Welter said nothing, but he determined that Charles should not have his way in this respect.

Charles continued, "When I came into this room to-night I came to quarrel with you. You have not allowed me to do so, and I thank you for it." Here he paused, and then went on in a lower voice, "I think you are sorry, Welter; are you not? I am sure you are sorry. I am sure you wouldn't have done it if you had foreseen the consequences, eh?"

Lord Welter's coarse under-lip shook for half a second, and his big chest heaved once; but he said nothing.

"Only think another time; that is all. Now do me a favour; make me a promise."

"I have made it."

"Don't tell any human soul you have seen me. If you do, you will only entail a new disguise and a new hiding on me. You have promised."

"On my honour."

"If you keep your promise, I can stay where I am. How is—Lady Ascot?"

"Well. Nursing my father."

"Is he ill?"

"Had a fit the day before yesterday. I heard this morning from them. He is much better, and will get over it."

"Have you heard anything from Ravenshoe?"

"Not a word. Lord Saltire and General Mainwaring are both with my father, in London. Grandma won't see either me or Adelaide. Do you know that she has been moving heaven and earth to find you?"

"Good soul! I won't be found, though. Now, good night!"

And he went. If any one had told him three months before that he would have been locked in the same room with a man who had done him such irreparable injury, and have left it at the end of half an hour with a quiet "good night," he would most likely have beaten

that man there and then. But he was getting tamed very fast. Ay, he was already getting more than tamed; he was in a fair way to get broken-hearted.

"I will not see her to-night, sir," he said to Hornby, whom he found with his head resting on the table; "I will come to-morrow and prepare her for leaving this house. You are to see her the day after to-morrow; but without hope, remember."

He roused a groom from above the stable to help him to saddle the horses. "Will it soon be morning?" he asked.

"Morning," said the lad; "it's not twelve o'clock yet. It's a dark night, mate, and no moon. But the nights are short now. The dawn will be on us before we have time to turn in our beds."

He rode slowly home after Hornby. "The night is dark, but the dawn will be upon us before we can turn in our beds!" Only the idle words of a sleepy groom, yet they echoed in his ears all the way home. The night is dark indeed; but it will be darker yet before the dawn, Charles Ravenshoe.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DINNER PARTY AMONG SOME OLD FRIENDS.

LADY HAINAULT (*née* Burton, not the Dowager) had asked some one to dinner, and the question had been whom to ask to meet him. Mary had been called into consultation, as she generally was on most occasions, and she and Lady Hainault had made up a list together. Every one had accepted, and was coming; and here were Mary and Lady Hainault, dressed for dinner, alone in the drawing-room with the children.

"We could not have done better for him, Mary, I think. You must go in to dinner with him."

"Is Mary going to stop down to dinner?" said the youngest boy; "what a shame! I sha'n't say my prayers to-night if she don't come up."

The straightforward Gus let his brother know what would be the consequences of such neglect hereafter, in a plain-spoken way peculiarly his own.

"Gus! Gus! don't say such things," said Lady Hainault.

"The hymn-book says so, aunt," said Gus, triumphantly; and he quoted a charming little verse of Dr. Watts's, beginning, "There is a dreadful Hell."

Lady Hainault might have been puzzled what to say,

and Mary would not have helped her, for they had had an argument about that same hymn-book (Mary contending that one or two of the hymns were as well left alone at first), when Flora struck in and saved her aunt, by remarking,

"I shall save up my money and buy some jewels for Mary like aunt's, so that when she stays down to dinner some of the men may fall in love with her, and marry her."

"Pooh! you silly goose," said Gus, "those jewels cost sixty million thousand pounds a-piece. I don't want her to be married till I grow up, and then I shall marry her myself. Till then I shall buy her a yellow wig, like grandma Hainault's, and then nobody will want to marry her."

"Be quiet, Gus," said Lady Hainault.

It was one thing to say "be quiet, Gus," and it was another thing to make him hold his tongue. But, to do Gus justice, he was a good fellow, and never acted "*enfant terrible*" but to the most select and private audience. Now he had begun: "I wish some one would marry grandma," when the door was thrown open, the first guest was announced, and Gus was dumb.

"General Mainwaring." The general sat down between Lady Hainault and Mary, and, while talking to them, reached out his broad brown hand and lifted the youngest boy on his knee, who played with his ribands, and cried out that he would have the orange and blue

one, if he pleased; while Gus and Flora came and stood at his knee.

He talked to them both sadly in a low voice about the ruin which had come on Lord Ascot. There was worse than mere ruin, he feared. He feared there was disgrace. He had been with him that morning. He was a wreck. One side of his face was sadly pulled down, and he stammered in his speech. He would get over it. He was only three-and-forty. But he would not show again in society, he feared. Here was somebody else; they would change the subject.

Lord Saltire. They were so glad to see him. Every one's face had a kind smile on it as the old man came and sat down among them. His own smile was not the least pleasant of the lot, I warrant you.

"So you are talking about poor Ascot, eh?" he said. "I don't know whether you were or not; but, if you were, let us talk about something else. You see, my dear Miss Corby, that my prophecy to you on the terrace at Ravenshoe is falsified. I said they would not fight, and lo, they are as good as at it."

They talked about the coming war, and Lord Hainault came in and joined them. Soon after another guest was announced.

Lady Ascot. She was dressed in dark grey silk, with her white hair simply parted under a plain lace cap. She looked so calm, so brave, so kind, so beautiful, as she came with firm strong step in at the door, that they one and all rose and came towards her. She

had always been loved by them all; how much more deeply was she loved now, when her bitter troubles had made her doubly sacred.

Lord Saltire gave her his arm, and she came and sat down among them with her hands calmly folded before her.

"I was determined to come and see you to-night, my dear," she said. "I should break down if I couldn't see some that I loved. And to-night, in particular" (she looked earnestly at Lord Saltire). "Is he come yet?"

"Not yet, dear grandma," said Mary.

"No one is coming besides, I suppose?" asked Lady Ascot.

"No one; we are waiting for him."

The door was opened once more, and they all looked curiously round. This time the servant announced, perhaps in a somewhat louder tone than usual, as if he were aware that they were more interested,

"Mr. Ravenshoe."

A well-dressed, gentlemanly-looking man came into the room, bearing such a wonderful likeness to Charles Ravenshoe, that Lady Hainault and General Mainwaring, the only two who had never seen him before, started, and thought they saw Charles himself. It was not Charles, though; it was our old friend, William, whilom pad-groom to Charles Ravenshoe, Esquire, now himself William Ravenshoe, Esquire, of Ravenshoe.

He was the guest of the evening. He would be heir

to Ravenshoe himself some day; for they had made up their minds that Cuthbert would never marry. Ravenshoe, as Cuthbert was managing it now, would be worth ten or twelve thousand a year, and, if these new tin lodes came to anything, perhaps twenty. He had been a stable-helper, said old Lady Hainault—the companion of the drunken riots of his foster-brother impostor, and that quiet gentlemanly creature Welter. If he entered the house, she left it. To which young Lady Hainault had replied that some one must ask him to dinner in common decency, if it was only for the sake of that dear Charles, who had been loved by every one who knew him. That she intended to ask him to dinner, and that, if her dear mother-in-law objected to meet him, why the remedy lay with herself. Somebody must introduce him to some sort of society; and Lord Hainault and herself had made up their minds to do it, so that further argument on the subject would be wasted breath. To which the Dowager replied that she really wished, after all, that Hainault had married that pretty chit of a thing, Adelaide Summers, as he was thinking of doing; as she, the Dowager, could not have been treated with greater insolence even by her, bold as she was. With which Parthian piece of spite she had departed to Casterton with Miss Hicks, and had so goaded and snapped at that unfortunate reduced gentlewoman by the way, that at last Hicks, as her wont was, had turned upon her and given her as good as she brought. If the Dowager could have heard Lady

Hainault telling her lord the whole business that night, and joking with him about his alleged *penchant* for Adelaide and heard the jolly laugh that those two good souls had about it, her ladyship would have been more spiteful still.

But, nevertheless, Lady Hainault was very nervous about William. When Mary was consulted, she promptly went bail for his good behaviour, and pled his cause so warmly that the tears stood in her eyes. Her old friend William! What innocent plots she and he had hatched together against the priest in old times. What a bond there was between them in their mutual love for him who was lost to them.

But Lady Hainault would be on the safe side; and so only the party named above were asked. All old friends of the family.

Before dinner was announced they were all at their ease about him. He was shy certainly, but not awkward. He evidently knew that he was asked there on trial, and he accepted his position. But he was so handsome (handsomer than poor Charles), he was so gentle and modest, and—perhaps, too, not least—had such a well modulated voice, that before the evening was over he had won every one in the room. If he knew anything of a subject he helped the conversation quietly, as well as he could; if he had to confess ignorance (which was seldom, for he was among well-bred people) he did so frankly, but unobtrusively. He was a great success.

One thing puzzled him, and pleased him. He knew that he was a person of importance, and that he was the guest of the evening. But he soon found that there was another cause for his being interesting to them all, more powerful than his curious position, or his prospective wealth; and that was his connexion with Charles Ravenshoe, now Horton. *He* was the hero of the evening. Half William's light was borrowed from him. He quickly became aware of it, and it made him happy.

How strange it is that some men have the power of winning such love from all they meet. I knew one, gone from us now by a glorious death, who had that faculty. Only a few knew his great worth and goodness; and yet, as his biographer most truly says, those who once saw his face never forgot it. Charles Ravenshoe had that faculty also, though, alas, his value, both in worth and utility, was far inferior to that of the man to whom I have alluded above.[1] But he had the same infinite kindness towards everything created; which is part of the secret.

The first hint that William had, as to how deeply important a person Charles was among the present company, was given him at dinner. Various subjects had been talked of indifferently, and William had listened, till Lord Hainault said to William,

"What a strange price people are giving for cobs! I saw one sold to day at Tattersall's for ninety guineas."

William answered, "Good cobs are very hard to get,

[1] I mean C. M.

Lord Hainault. I could get you ten good horses over fifteen, for one good cob."

Lord Saltire said, "My cob is the best I ever had; and a sweet-tempered creature. Our dear boy broke it for me at Ravenshoe."

"Dear Charles," said Lady Ascot. "What a splendid rider he was! Dear boy! He got Ascot to write him a certificate about that sort of thing before he went away. Ah, dear!"

"I never thought," said Lord Saltire, quietly, "that I ever should have cared half as much for anybody as I do for that lad. Do you remember, Mainwaring," he continued, speaking still lower, while they all sat hushed, "the first night I ever saw him, when he marked for you and me at billiards, at Ranford? I don't know why, but I loved the boy from the first moment I saw him. Both there and ever afterwards, he reminded me so strongly of Barkham. He had just the same gentle, winning way with him that Barkham had. Barkham was a little taller, though, I fancy," he went on, looking straight at Lady Ascot, and taking snuff. "Don't you think so, Maria?"

No one spoke for a moment.

Lord Barkham had been Lord Saltire's only son. He had been killed in a duel at nineteen, as I have mentioned before. Lord Saltire very rarely spoke of him, and, when he did, generally in a cynical manner. But General Mainwaring and Lady Ascot knew that the memory of that poor boy was as fresh in the true

old heart after forty years, as it was on the morning when he came out from his dressing-room, and met them carrying his corpse upstairs.

"He was a good fellow," said Lord Hainault, alluding to Charles. "He was a very good fellow."

"This great disappointment which I have had about him," said Lord Saltire, in his old dry tone, "is a just judgment on me for doing a good-natured and virtuous action many years ago. When his poor father Densil was in prison, I went to see him, and reconciled him with his family. Poor Densil was so grateful for this act of folly on my part, that I grew personally attached to him; and hence all this misery. Disinterested actions are great mistakes, Maria, depend upon it."

When the ladies were gone upstairs, William found Lord Saltire beside him. He talked to him a little time, and then finished by saying—

"You are modest and gentlemanly, and the love you bear for your foster-brother is very pleasing to me indeed. I am going to put it to the test. You must come and see me to-morrow morning. I have a great deal to say to you."

"About him, my lord? Have you heard of him?"

"Not a word. I fear he has gone to America or Australia. He told Lord Ascot he should do so."

"I'll hunt him to the world's end, my lord," said true William. "And Cuthbert shall pray for me the while. I fear you are right. But we shall find him soon."

When they went up into the drawing-room, Mary was sitting on a sofa by herself. She looked up to William, and he went and sat down by her. They were quite away from the rest, together.

"Dear William," said Mary, looking frankly at him, and laying her hand on his.

"I am so glad," said William, "to see your sweet face again. I was down at Ravenshoe last week. How they love you there! An idea prevails among old and young that dear Cuthbert is to die, and that I am to marry you, and that we are to rule Ravenshoe triumphantly. It was useless to represent to them that Cuthbert would not die, and that you and I most certainly never would marry one another. My dearest Jane Evans was treated as a thing of nought. You were elected mistress of Ravenshoe unanimously."

"How is Jane?"

"Pining, poor dear, at her school. She don't like it."

"I should think not," said Mary. "Give my dear love to her. She will make you a good wife. How is Cuthbert?"

"Very well in health. No more signs of his heart complaint, which never existed. But he is peaking at getting no tidings from Charles. Ah, how he loved him! May I call you 'Mary?'"

"You must not dare to call me anything else. No tidings of him yet?"

"None. I feel sure he is gone to America. We will get him back, Mary. Never fear."

They talked till she was cheerful, and at last she said—

"William, you were always so well-mannered; but how—how—have you got to be so gentlemanly in so short a time?"

"By playing at it," said William, laughing. "The stud-groom at Ravenshoe used always to say I was too much of a gentleman for him. In twenty years' time I shall pass muster in a crowd. Good night."

And Charles was playing at being something other than a gentleman all the time. We shall see who did best in the end.

CHAPTER XV.

CHARLES'S SECOND EXPEDITION TO ST. JOHN'S WOOD.

WHAT a happy place a man's bed is—probably the best place in which he ever finds himself. Very few people will like to deny that, I think; that is to say, as a general rule. After a long day's shooting in cold weather, for instance; or half a night on deck among the ice, when the fog has lifted, and the ghastly cold walls are safe in sight; or after a fifty mile ride in the bush, under a pouring rain; or after a pleasant ball, when you have to pull down the blind, that the impudent sun may not roast you awake in two hours; for in all these cases, and a hundred more, bed is very pleasant; but you know as well as I do, that there are times when you would sooner be on a frozen deck, or in the wildest bush in the worst weather, or waltzing in the hall of Eblis with Vathek's mama, or almost in your very grave, than in bed, and awake.

Oh, the weary watches! when the soul, which in sleep would leave the tortured body to rest and ramble off in dreams, holds on by a mere thread, yet a thread strong enough to keep every nerve in tense agony. When one's waking dreams of the past are as vivid as those of sleep, and there is always present, through all, the dreadful

lurking thought that one is awake, and that it is all real. When, looking back, every kindly impulsive action, every heartily spoken word, makes you fancy that you have only earned contempt where you merit kindness. Where the past looks like a hell of missed opportunities, and the future like another black hopeless hell of uncertainty and imminent misfortune of all kinds! Oh, weary watches. Let us be at such times on the bleakest hill-side, in the coldest night that ever blew, rather than in the warmest bed that money will buy.

When you are going to have a night of this kind, you seldom know it beforehand, for certain. Sometimes, if you have had much experience in the sort of thing—if you have lost money, or gone in debt, or if your sweetheart has cut you very often—you may at last guess, before you get your boots off, that you are going to have a night of it; in which case, read yourself to sleep *in bed*. Never mind burning the house down (that would be rather desirable as a distraction from thought); but don't read till you are sleepy with your clothes on, and then undress, because, if you do, you will find, by the time you have undressed yourself, that you are terribly wide awake, and, when the candle is blown out, you will be all ready for a regular Walpurgis night.

Charles, poor lad, had not as yet had much experience of Walpurgis nights. Before his catastrophe he had never had one. He had been used to tumble tired into his bed, and sleep a heavy dreamless sleep till an hour before

waking. Then, indeed, he might begin to dream of his horses, and his dogs, and so on, and then gradually wake into a state more sweet than the sweetest dream—that state in which sense is awake to all outward objects, but in which the soul is taking its few last airy flutters round its home, before coming to rest for the day. But, even since then, he had not had experience enough to make him dread the night. The night he came home from St. John's Wood, he thought he would go to bed and sleep it off. Poor fellow!

A fellow-servant slept in the same room with him—the younger and better-tempered of the two (though Charles had no complaint against either of them). The lad was asleep; and, before Charles put out the light, he looked at him. His cheek was laid on his arm, and he seemed so calm and happy that Charles knew he was not there, but far away. He was right. As he looked, the lad smiled, and babbled of something in his dream. Strange! the soul had still sufficient connexion with the body to make it smile.

"I wonder if Miss Martineau or Mr. Atkinson ever watched the face of one who slept and dreamt," said Charles, rambling on as soon as he had got into bed. "Pish! why that fellow's body is the mere tool of his soul. His soul is out a-walking, and his body is only a log. Hey, that won't do; that's as bad as Miss Martineau. I should have said that his body is only a fine piece of clockwork. But clockwork don't smile of itself. My dear Madam, and Mr. Atkinson, I am going

to leave my body behind, and be off at Ravenshoe in five minutes. That is to say, I am going to sleep."

He was, was he? Why no, not just at present. If he had meant to do so, he had, perhaps, better not have bothered himself about "Letters on the laws of man's nature;" for, when he had done his profound cogitations about them, as above, he thought that he had got a—— well, say a pulex, in his bed. There was no more a pulex than there was a scorpion; but he had an exciting chase after an imaginary one, like our old friend Mr. Sponge after an imaginary fox at Laverick Wells. After this, he had an irritation where he couldn't reach, that is to say, in the middle of his back; then he had the same complaint where he could reach, and used a certain remedy (which is a pretty way of saying that he scratched himself); then he had the cramp in his right leg; then he had the cramp in his left leg; then he grew hot all over, and threw the clothes off; then he grew cold all over, and pulled them on again; then he had the cramp in his left leg again; then he had another flea hunt, cramp, irritation in back, heat, cold, and so on, all over; and then, after half an hour, finding himself in a state of feverish despondency, he fell into a cheerful train of thought, and was quite inclined to look at his already pleasant prospects from a hopeful point of view.

Poor dear fellow! You may say that it is heartless to make fun of him just now, when everything is going so terribly wrong. But really my story is so very sad,

that we must try to make a little feeble fun where we can, or it would be unreadable.

He tried to face the future, manfully. But lo, there was no future to face—it was all such a dead, hopeless blank. Ellen must come away from that house, and he must support her; but how? It would be dishonourable for him to come upon the Ravenshoes for a farthing, and it would be dishonourable for her to marry that foolish Hornby. And these two courses, being dishonourable, were impossible. And there he was brought up short.

But would either course be dishonourable? Yes, yes, was the answer each weary time he put the question to himself; and there the matter ended. Was there one soul in the wide world he could consult? Not one. All alone in the weary world, he and she. Not one friend for either of them. They had made their beds, and must lie on them. When would the end of it all come? What would the end be?

There was a noise in the street. A noise of a woman scolding, whose voice got louder and louder, till it rose into a scream. A noise of a man cursing and abusing her; then a louder scream, and a sound of blows. One, two; then a heavy fall, and silence. A drunken, homeless couple had fallen out in the street, and the man had knocked the woman down. That was all. It was very common. Probably the woman was not much hurt. That sort of woman got used to it. The police would come and take them to the station. There they were.

The man and woman were being taken off by two constables, scolding and swearing. Well, well!

Was it to come to that? There were bridges in London, and under them runs the river. Charles had come over one once, after midnight. He wished he had never seen the cursed place. He remembered a fluttering figure which had come and begged a halfpenny of him to pay the toll, and get home. He had given her money, and then, by a sudden impulse, followed her till she was safe off the bridge. Ugly thoughts, Charles! ugly thoughts! Will the dawn never come? Why, the night is not half over yet.

God in his mercy sets a limit to human misery in many ways. I do not believe that the condemned man, waiting through the weary night for the gallows, thinks all night through of his fate. We read generally in those accounts of the terrible last night (which are so rightly published in the newspapers—they are the most terrifying part of the punishment), that they conversed cheerfully, or slept, or did something, showing that they half forgot for a time what was coming. And so, before the little window grew to a lighter grey, poor Charles had found some relief from his misery. He was between sleep and waking, and he had fulfilled his challenge to Miss Martineau, though later than he intended. He had gone to Ravenshoe.

There it was, all before him. The dawn behind the eastern headland had flooded the amphitheatre of hills, till the crags behind the house had turned from grey to

gold, and the vane upon the priest's tower shone like a star. The sea had changed from black to purple, and the fishing boats were stealing lazily homewards, over the gentle rolling groundswell. The surf was whispering to the sand of their coming. As window after window blazed out before the sun, and as woodland and hill-side, stream and park, village and lonely farm in the distant valley, waked before the coming day, Charles watched, in his mind's eye, the dark old porch, till there came out a figure in black, and stood solitary in the terrace gazing seawards. And as he said, "Cuthbert," he fell into a dreamless, happy sleep.

He determined that he would not go to see Ellen till the afternoon. Hornby was on duty in the morning, and never saw Charles all day; he avoided him as though on purpose. Charles, on his part, did not want to meet him till he had made some definite arrangement, and so was glad of it. But, towards two o'clock, it came across his mind that he would saunter round to St. Peter's Church, and see the comical little imp of a boy who was generally to be found there, and beguile a quarter of an hour by listening to his prattle.

He had given up reading. He had hardly opened a book since his misfortune. This may seem an odd thing to have to record about a gentleman, and to a certain extent a scholar; but so it was. He wanted to lower himself, and he was beginning to succeed. There was an essential honesty in him, which made him hate to appear what he was not; and this feeling, carried to

an absurd extent, prevented his taking refuge in the most obvious remedy for all troubles except hunger: books. He did not know, as I do, that determined reading: reading of anything, even the advertisements in a newspaper; will stop all cravings except those of the stomach, and will even soften them; but he guessed it, nevertheless. "Why should I read it?" said he. "I must learn to do as the rest of them." And so he did as the rest of them, and "rather loafed away his time than otherwise."

And he was more inclined to "loaf" than usual this day, because he very much dreaded what was to come. And so he dawdled round to St. Peter's Church, and came upon his young friend, playing at fives with the ball he had given him, as energetically as he had before played with the brass button. Shoeblacks are compelled to a great deal of unavoidable "loafing;" but certainly this one loafed rather energetically, for he was hot and frantic in his play.

He was very glad to see Charles. He parted his matted hair from his face, and looking at him admiringly with a pleasant smile; then he suddenly said—

"You was drunk last night, worn't you?"

Charles said, No—that he never got drunk.

"Worn't you really, though?" said the boy; "you look as tho' you had a been. You looks wild about the eyes," and then he hazarded another theory to account for Charles's appearance, which Charles also negatived emphatically.

"I give a halpenny for this one," said the boy, showing him the ball, "and I spent the other halpenny." Here he paused, expecting a rebuke, apparently; but Charles nodded kindly at him, and he was encouraged to go on, and to communicate a piece of intelligence with the air of one who assumes that his hearer is *au fait* with all the movements of the great world, and will be interested.

"Old Biddy Flanigan's dead."

"No! is she?" said Charles, who, of course, had not the wildest idea who she was, but guessed her to be an aged, and probably dissipated Irishwoman.

"Ah! I believe you," said the boy. "And they was a-waking on her last night, down in our court (he said, 'dăŏne in ăŏur cawt'). They waked we sharp enough; but, as for she! she's fast."

"What did she die of?" asked Charles.

"Well, she died mostly along of Mr. Malone's bumble foot, I fancy. Him and old Biddy was both drunk a-fighting on the stairs, and she was a step below he; and he being drunk, and bumble-footed too, lost his balance, and down they come together, and the back of her head come against the door scraper, and there she was. Wake she!" he added with scorn, "not if all the Irish and Rooshans in France was to put stones in their stockings, and howl a week on end, they wouldn't wake her."

"Did they put stones in their stockings?" asked Charles, thinking that it was some papist form of penance.

"Miss Ophelia Flanigan, she put half a brick in her stocking end, so she did, and come at Mr. Malone for to break his head with it, and there were a hole in the stocking, and the brick flew out, and hit old Denny Moriarty in the jaw, and broke it. And he worn't a doing nothink, he worn't; but was sitting in a corner decent and quiet, blind drunk, a singing to his self; and they took he to Guy's orspital. And the pleece come in, and got gallus well kicked about the head, and then they took they to Guy's orspital; and then Miss Flanigan fell out of winder into the airy, and then they took she to Guy's orspital; and there they is, the whole bilin of 'em in bed together, with their heads broke, a-eating of jelly and a-drinking of sherry wind; and then in comes a mob from Rosemary-lane, and then they all begins to get a bit noisy and want to fight, and so I hooked it."

"Then there are a good many Irish in your court?" said Charles.

"Irish! ah! I believe you. They're all Irish there except we and Billy Jones's lot. The Emperor of Rooshar is a nigger; but his lot is mostly Irish, but another bilin of Irish from Mr. Malone's lot. And one on 'em plays the bagpipes, with a bellus, against the water-butt of a Sunday evening, when they're off the lay. And Mr. Malone's lot heaves crockery and broken vegetables at him out of winder, by reason of their being costermongers, and having such things handy; so there's mostly a shine of a Sunday evening."

"But who are Mr. Malone, and Billy Jones, and the Emperor of Russia?"

"They keeps lodging houses," said the boy. "Miss Ophelia Flanigan is married on Mr. Malone, but she keeps her own name, because her family's a better one nor his'n, and she's ashamed of him. They gets on very well when they're sober, but since they've been a making money they mostly gets drunk in bed of a morning, so they ain't so happy together as they was."

"Does she often attack him with a brick in the foot of a stocking?" asked Charles.

"No," said the boy; "she said her papa had taught her that little game. She used to fist hold of the poker, but he got up to that, and spouted it. So now they pokes the fire with a mopstick, which ain't so handy to hit with, and softer."

Charles walked away northward, and thought what a charming sort of person Miss Ophelia Flanigan must be, and how he would rather like to know her for curiosity's sake. The picture he drew of her in his mind was not exactly like the original, as we shall see.

It was very pleasant summer weather—weather in which an idle man would be inclined to dawdle, under any circumstances; and Charles was the more inclined to dawdle, because he very much disliked the errand on which he went. He could loiter at street corners now with the best of them, and talk to any one who happened to be loitering there too. He was getting on.

So he loitered at street corners, and talked. And he found out something to-day for the first time. He had been so absorbed in his own troubles that all rumours had been to him like the buzzing of bees; but to-day he began to appreciate that this rumour of war was no longer a mere rumour, but likely to grow into an awful reality.

If he were only free, he said to himself. If he could only provide for poor Ellen. "Gad, if they could get up a regiment of fellows in the same state of mind as I am!"

He went into a public-house, and drank a glass of ale. They were talking of it there. "Sir Charles Napier is to have the fleet," said one man, "and if he don't bring Cronstadt about their ears in two hours, I am a Dutchman. As for Odessa—"

A man in seedy black, who (let us hope) had seen better days, suggested Sebastopol.

The first man had not heard of Sebastopol. It could not be a place of much importance, or he must have heard of it. Talk to him about Petersburg and Moscow, and he would listen to you.

This sort of talk, heard everywhere on his slow walk, excited Charles; and thinking over it, he came to the door of Lord Welter's house and rang.

The door was barely opened, when he saw Lord Welter himself in the hall, who called to him by his Christian name, and bade him come in. Charles followed Lord Welter into a room, and, when the

latter turned round, Charles saw that he was disturbed and anxious.

"Charles," he said, "Ellen is gone!"

Charles said "Where?" for he hardly understood him.

"Where? God knows! She must have left the house soon after you saw her last night. She left this note for me. Take it and read it. You see I am free from blame in this matter."

Charles took it and read it.

"My Lord,

"I should have consented to accept the shelter of your roof for a longer period, were it not that, by doing so, I should be continually tempted to the commission of a dishonourable action—an action which would bring speedy punishment on myself, by ruining too surely the man whom, of all others in the world, I love and respect.

"Lieutenant Hornby has proposed marriage to me. Your lordship's fine sense of honour will show you at once how impossible it is for me to consent to ruin his prospects by a union with such a one as myself. Distrusting my own resolution, I have fled, and henceforth I am dead to him and to you.

"Ah! Welter, Welter! you yourself might have been loved as he is, once; but that time is gone by for ever. I should have made you a better wife than Adelaide. I might have loved you myself once, but I fell more through anger and vanity than through love.

"My brother, he whom we call Charles Ravenshoe, is in this weary world somewhere. I have an idea that you will meet him. You used to love one another. Don't let him quarrel with you for such a worthless straw as I am. Tell him I always loved him as a brother. It is better that we should not meet yet. Tell him that he must make his own place in the world before we meet, and then I have something to say to him.

"Mary, the Mother of God, and the blessed saints before the throne, bless you and him, here and hereafter!"

Charles had nothing to say to Lord Welter, not one word. He saw that the letter was genuine. He understood that Welter had had no time to tell her of his coming, and that she was gone; neither Welter nor he knew where, or were likely to know; that was all. He only bid him good-bye, and walked home again.

When you know the whole story, you will think that Charles's run of ill luck at this time is almost incredible; but I should call you to witness that it is not so. This was the first stroke of real ill luck that he had had. All his other misfortunes came from his mad determination of alienating himself from all his friends. If he had even left Lord Welter free to have mentioned that he had been seen, all might have gone well, but he made him promise secrecy; and now, after having, so to speak, made ill luck for himself, and lamented over it,

here was a real stroke of it with a vengeance, and he did not know it. He was not anxious about Ellen's future; he felt sure at once that she was going into some Roman Catholic refuge, where she would be quiet and happy. In fact, with a new fancy he had in his head, he was almost content to have missed her. And Ellen, meanwhile, never dreamt either of his position or state of mind, or she would have searched him out at the end of the world. She thought he was just as he always had been, or, perhaps, turning his attention to some useful career, with Cuthbert's assistance; and she thought she would wait, and wait she did; and they went apart, not to meet till the valley of the shadow of death had been passed, and life was not so well worth having as it had been.

But as for our old friend, Father Mackworth. As I said once before, "It's no use wondering, but I do wonder," whether Father Mackworth, had he known how near Ellen and Charles had been to meeting the night before, would not have whistled "Lillibulero," as Uncle Toby did in times of dismay; that is, if he had known the tune.

CHAPTER XVI.

RAVENSHOE HALL, DURING ALL THIS.

THE villagers at Ravenshoe, who loved Charles, were very much puzzled and put out by his sudden disappearance. Although they had little or no idea of the real cause of his absence, yet it was understood to be a truth, not to be gainsayed, that it was permanent. And as it was a heavily-felt misfortune to them, and as they really had no idea why he was gone, or where he was gone to, it became necessary that they should comfort themselves by a formula. At which time, Master Lee, up to Slarrow, erected the theory, that Master Charles was gone to the Indies—which was found to be a doctrine so comfortable to the souls of those that adopted it, as being hazy and vague, and as leaving his return an open question, that it was unanimously adopted; and those who ventured to doubt it, were treated as heretics and heathens.

It was an additional puzzle to them to find that William had turned out to be a gentleman, and a Ravenshoe; a fact which could not, of course, be concealed from them, though the other facts of the case were carefully hushed up—not a very difficult matter in a simple feudal village, like Ravenshoe. But, when William

appeared, after a short absence, he suffered greatly in popularity, from the belief that he had allowed Charles to go to the Indies by himself. Old Master James Lee, of Tor Head, old Master James Lee, of Withycombe Barton, and old Master James Lee, up to Slarrow, the three great quidnuncs of the village, were sunning themselves one day under the wall which divides part of the village from the shore, when by there came, talking earnestly together, William, and John Marston.

The three old men raised their hats, courteously. They were in no distinguishable relation to one other, but, from similarity of name and age, always hunted in a leash. (Sporting men will notice a confusion here about the word "leash," but let it pass.) When no one was by, I have heard them fall out and squabble together about dates, or such like; but, when others were present, they would, so to speak, trump one another's tricks to any amount. And if, on these occasions, any one of the three took up an untenable position, the other two would lie him out of it like Jesuits, and only fall foul of him when they were alone together—which, to say the least of it, was neighbourly and decent.

"God save you, gentlemen," said old Master Lee up to Slarrow, who was allowed to commit himself by the other two, who were waiting to be "down on him" in private. "Any news from the Indies lately?"

William and Marston stopped, and William said—

"No, Master Lee, we have not heard from Captain Archer for seven months, or more."

"I ask your pardon," said Lee up to Slarrow; "I warn't a speaking of he. I was speaking of our own darling boy, Master Charles. When be he a-coming back to see we?"

"When, indeed!" said William. "I wish I knew, Master Lee."

"They Indies," said the old man, "is well enough; but what's he there no more than any other gentleman? Why don't he come home to his own? Who's a-keeping on him away?"

William and John Marston walked on without answering. And then the two other Master Lees fell on to Master Lee up to Slarrow, and verbally ill treated him—partly because he had go no information out of William, and partly because, having both sat quiet and given him plenty of rope, he had not hanged himself. Master Lee up to Slarrow had evil times of it that blessed spring afternoon, and ended by "dratting" both his companions, for a couple of old fools. After which, they adjourned to the public-house and hard cider, sent them to drink for their sins.

"They'll never make a scholar of me, Marston," said William; "I will go on at it for a year, but no more. I shall away soon to hunt up Charles. Is there any police in America?"

Marston answered absently, "Yes; he believed so;" but was evidently thinking of something else.

They had gone sauntering out for a walk together. Marston had come down from Oxford the day before

(after an examination for an Exeter fellowship, I believe) for change of air; and he thought he would like to walk with William up to the top of the lofty promontory, which bounded Ravenshoe-bay on the west, and catch the pleasant summer breeze coming in from the Atlantic.

On the loftiest point of all, with the whispering blue sea on three sides of them, four hundred feet below, there they sat down on the short sheep-eaten turf, and looked westward.

Cape after cape stretched away under the afternoon sun, till the last seemed only a dark cloud floating on the sea. Beyond that cape there was nothing but water for three thousand weary miles. The scene was beautiful enough, but very melancholy; a long coast-line, trending away into dim distance, on a quiet sunny afternoon, is very melancholy. Indeed, far more melancholy than the same place in a howling gale: when the nearest promontory only, is dimly visible, a black wall, echoing the thunder of bursting waves, and when sea, air, and sky, like the three furies, are rushing on with mad, destructive unanimity.

They lay, these two, on the short turf, looking westward; and, after a time, John Marston broke silence. He spoke very low and quietly, and without looking at William.

"I have something very heavy on my mind, William. I am not a fool, with a morbid conscience, but I have been very wrong. I have done what I never can undo. I loved that fellow, William!"

William said "Ay."

"I know what you would say. You would say, that every one who ever knew Charles loved him; and you are right. He was so utterly unselfish, so entirely given up to trying to win others, that every one loved him, and could not help it. The cleverest man in England, with all his cleverness, could not gain so many friends as Charles."

William seemed to think this such a self-evident proposition, that he did not think it worth while to say anything.

"And Charles was not clever. And what makes me mad with myself is this. I had influence over him, and I abused it. I was not gentle enough with him. I used to make fun of him, and be flippant, and priggish, and dictatorial, with him. God help me! And now he has taken some desperate step, and, in fear of my ridicule, has not told me of it. I felt sure he would come to me, but I have lost hope now. May God forgive me—God forgive me!"

In a few moments, William said, "If you pause to think, Marston, you will see how unjust you are to yourself. He could not be afraid of me, and yet he has never come near me."

"Of course not," said Marston. "You seem hardly to know him so well as I. He fears that you would make him take money, and that he would be a burthen on you. I never expected that he would come back to you. He knows that you would never leave him. He

knows, as well as you know yourself, that you would sacrifice all your time and your opportunities of education to him. And, by being dependent on you, he would be dependent on Father Mackworth—the only man in the world he dislikes and distrusts.

William uttered a form of speech concerning the good father, which is considered by foreigners to be merely a harmless national *facon de parler*—sometimes, perhaps, intensive, when the participle is used, but in general no more than expletive. In this case, the speaker was, I fear, in earnest, and meant what he said most heartily.

Marston never swore, but he certainly did not correct William for swearing, in this case, as he should have done. There was a silence for a time. After a little, William laid his hand on Marston's shoulder, and said—

"He never had a truer friend than you. Don't you blame yourself."

"I do; and shall, until I find him."

"Marston," said William, "what *has* he done with himself? Where the deuce is he gone?"

"Lord Saltire and I were over the same problem for two hours the other night, and we could make nothing of it, but that he was gone to America or Australia. He hardly took money enough with him to keep him till now. I can make nothing of it. Do *you* think he would be likely to seek out Welter?"

"If he were going to do so, he would have done so

by now, and we must have heard of it. No," said William.

"He was capable of doing very odd things," said Marston. "Do you remember that Easter vacation, when he and Lord Welter and Mowbray went away together?"

"Remember!" said William. "Why I was with them; and glorious fun it was. Rather fast fun though —too fast by half. We went up and lived on the Severn and Avon Canal, among the bargemen, dressing accordingly. Charles had nothing to do with that folly, beyond joining in it, and spending the day in laughing. That was Lord Welter's doing. The bargees nicknamed Lord Welter "the sweep," and said he was a good fellow, but a terrible blackguard. And so he was—for that time, at all events.

Marston laughed, and, after a time, said, "Did he ever seem to care about soldiering? Do you think he was likely to enlist?"

"It is possible," said William; "it is quite possible. Yes, he has often talked to me about soldiering. I mind —I remember, I should say—that he once was hot about going into the army, but he gave it up because it would have taken him away from Mr. Ravenshoe too much."

They turned and walked homewards, without speaking a word all the way. On the bridge they paused and leant upon the coping, looking into the stream. All of a sudden, William laid his hand on Marston's arm, and looking in his face, said—

"Every day we lose, I feel he is getting farther fro
us. I don't know what may happen. I shall go an
seek him. I will get educated at my leisure. Onl
think of what may be happening now! I was a fo
to have given it up so soon, and to have tried waitin
till he came to us. He will never come. I must g
and fetch him. Here is Cuthbert, too, good fello
fretting himself to death about it. Let us go and tal
to him."

And John Marston said, "Right, true heart; let u
go."

Of all their acquaintances, there was only one wh
could have given them any information—Lord Welter
and he, of all others, was the very last they dreamt o
going to. You begin to see, I dare say, that, whe
Charles is found, my story will nearly be at an end
But my story is not near finished yet, I assure you.

Standing where they were on the bridge, they coul
look along the village street. It was as neat a street a
one ever sees in a fishing village; that is to say, rathe
an untidy one, for, of all human employments, fishing
involves more lumber and mess than any other. Every
thing past use was "hit," as they say in Berkshire, ou
into the street; and of the inorganic part of this refuse
that is to say, tiles, bricks, potsherds, and so on, th
children built themselves shops and bazaars, and sol
one another the organic orts, that is to say, cabbage
stalks, fish-bones, and orange-peel, which were paid fo
in mussel-shells. And, as Marston and William looke

along this street, as one may say, at high market time, they saw Cuthbert come, slowly riding along among the children, and the dogs, and the pigs, and the herring-bones, and brickbats.

He was riding a noble horse, and was dressed with his usual faultless neatness and good taste, as clean as a new pin from top to toe. As he came along, picking his way gently among the children, the fishermen and their wives came out right and left from their doors, and greeted him kindly. In older times they would not have done this, but it had got about that he was pining for the loss of his brother, and their hearts had warmed to him. It did not take much to make their hearts warm to a Ravenshoe; though they were sturdy, independent rogues enough at times. I am a very great admirer of the old feudal feeling, when it is not abused by either party. In parts of Australia, where it, or something near akin to it, is very strong indeed, I have seen it act on high and low most beneficially; giving to the one side a sense of responsibility, and to the other a feeling of trust and reliance. "Here's 'Captain Dash,' or 'Colonel Blank,' or 'Mr. So-and-so,' and he won't see me wronged, I know. I have served him and his father for forty year, and he's a *gentleman*, and so were his father before him." That is the sort of thing you will hear often enough in Australia. And even on the diggings, with all the leaven of Americanism and European Radicalism one finds there, it is much easier for a warden to get on with the diggers if he comes of a

known colonial family, than if he is an unknown man. The old colonial diggers, the people of the greatest real weight, talk of them, and the others listen and mark. All people, prate as they may, like a guarantee for respectability. In the colonies, such a guarantee is given by a man's being tolerably well off, and "come of decent people." In England, it is given, in cases, by a man and a man's forefathers having been good landlords and honest men. Such a guarantee is given by such people as the Ravenshoes, but that is not the whole secret of *their* influence. That comes more from association—a feeling strong enough, as one sees, to make educated and clever men use their talents and eloquence towards keeping a school in a crowded, unhealthy neighbourhood, instead of moving it into the country; merely because, as far as one can gather from their speeches, they were educated at it themselves, twenty years ago. Hereby visiting the sins of the fathers on the children, with a vengeance!

"Somewhat too much of this." It would be stretching a point to say that Cuthbert was a handsome man, though he was very near being so, indeed. He was tall, but not too slender, for he had developed in chest somewhat since we first knew him. His face was rather pale, but his complexion perfectly clear; save that he had a black mark round his eyes. His features were decidedly marked, but not so strongly as Charles's; and there was an air of stately repose about him, showing itself in his way of carrying his head perfectly upright,

and the firm, but not harsh, settling of his mouth, with the lower lip slightly pouting, which was very attractive. He was a consummate horseman, too, and, as I said, perfectly dressed; and, as he came towards them, looking apparently at nothing, both William and Marston thought they had never seen a finer specimen of a gentleman.

He had strangely altered in two months. As great a change had come over him as comes over a rustic when the drill-sergeant gets him and makes a soldier of him. There is the same body, the same features, the same hair and eyes. Bill Jones is Bill Jones, if you are to believe his mother. But Bill Jones the soldier is not Bill Jones the ploughboy. He is quite a different person. So, since the night when Charles departed, Cuthbert had not been the Cuthbert of former times. He was no longer wayward and irritable; he was as silent as ever, but he had grown so staid, so studiously courteous to every one, so exceedingly humble-minded and patient with every one, that all save one or two wondered at the change in him.

He had been passionately fond of Charles, though he had seldom shown it, and was terribly cut up at his loss. He had greatly humiliated himself to himself by what was certainly his felonious offer to Father Mackworth; and he had found the estate somewhat involved, and had determined to set to work and bring it to rights. These three causes had made Cuthbert Ravenshoe a humbler and better man than he had ever been before.

"William," he said, smiling kindly on him, "I have been seeing after your estate for you. It does me good to have some one to work for. You will die a rich man."

William said nothing. One of Cuthbert's fixed notions was that he would die young and childless. He claimed to have a heart-complaint, though it really appeared without any foundation. It was a fancy which William had combated at first, but now acquiesced in, because he found it useless to do otherwise.

He dismounted and walked with them. "Cuthbert," said William, "we have been thinking about Charles."

"I am always thinking about him," said Cuthbert; "is there no way of finding him?"

"I am going. I want you to give me some money and let me go."

"You had better go at once, William. You had better try if the police can help you. We are pretty sure that he is gone to America, unless he has enlisted. In either case, it is very possible we may find him. Aunt Ascot would have succeeded, if she had not lost her temper. Don't you think I am right, my dear Marston?"

"I do, indeed, Ravenshoe," said Marston. "Don't you think now, Mr. Mackworth, that, if a real push is made, and with judgment, we may find Charles again?"

They had reached the terrace, and Father Mackworth was standing in front of the porch. He said he believed it was perfectly possible. "Nay," he said, "possible! I

am as sure of seeing Charles Horton back here again, as I am that I shall eat my dinner to-day."

"And I," said Cuthbert, "am equally sure that we shall see poor Ellen back some day. Poor girl! she shall have a warm welcome."

Father Mackworth said he hoped it might be so. And the lie did not choke him.

"We are going to send William away again to look after him, father," said Cuthbert.

"He had much better stay at home and mind his education," said Mackworth.

William had his back towards them, and was looking out to sea, whistling. When the priest spoke he turned round sharply, and said—

"Hey? what's that?"

The priest repeated it.

"I suppose," said William, "that that is more my business than yours, is it not? I don't intend to go to school again, certainly not to you."

Cuthbert looked from one to the other of them, and said nothing. A few days before this William and the priest had fallen out; and Mackworth, appealing, had been told with the greatest kindness and politeness by Cuthbert that he could not interfere. That William was heir to Ravenshoe, and that he really had no power over him whatever. Mackworth had said nothing then, but now he had followed Cuthbert into the library, and, when they were alone, said—

"Cuthbert, I did not expect this from you. You

have let him insult me twice, and have not corrected him."

Cuthbert put his back against the door, and said—

"Now you don't leave this room till you apologize for these wicked words. My dear old fellow, what a goose you are! Have not you and he always squabbled? Do fight it out with him, and don't try and force me to take a side. I ain't going to do it, you know, and so I tell you plainly. Give it to him. Who can do it so well as you? Remember what an altered position he is in. How can you expect me to take your part against him?"

Father Mackworth cleared his brow, and said, laughing, "You are right, Cuthbert. I'll go about with the rogue. He is inclined to kick over the traces, but I'll whip him in a little. I have had the whip hand of every Ravenshoe I have had to deal with yet, yourself included, and it's hard if I am to be beat by this new whipper-snapper."

Cuthbert said affectionately to him, "I think you love me, Mackworth. Don't quarrel with him more than you can help. I know you love me." And so Cuthbert went to seek John Marston.

Love him! Ay, that he did. John Mackworth could be cruel, hard, false, vindictive. He could cheat, and he could lie, if need were. He was heartless and ambitious. But he loved Cuthbert. It was a love which had taken a long time growing, but there it was, and he was half ashamed of it. Even to himself he

would try to make out that it was mere selfishness and ambition—that he was gentle with Cuthbert, because he must keep his place at Ravenshoe. Even now he would try to persuade himself that such was the case—perhaps the more strongly, because he began to see now that there was a soft spot in his heart, and that Cuthbert was master of it. Since the night when Cuthbert had offered him ten thousand pounds, and he had refused it, Cuthbert had never been the same to him. And Mackworth, expecting to find his influence increased, found to his astonishment that from that moment it was *gone*. Cuthbert's intensely sensitive and proud nature revolted from the domination of a man before whom he had so lowered himself; and firmly, though humbly now, for he was altered by seeing how nearly he had been a villain, he let him see that he would walk in future in his own strength. Father Mackworth saw soon that Ravenshoe was a comfortable home for him, but that his power was gone. Unless!

And yet he knew that he could exercise a power little dreamt of. It is in the power, possibly, of a condemned man to burn the prison down, and possibly his interest; but he has compunctions. Mackworth tried to persuade himself that the reason he did not use his power was that it would not be advisable. He was a cipher in the house, and knew by instinct that he would never be more. But in reality, I believe, he let his power sleep for Cuthbert's sake.

"Who could have thought," he said, "that the very

thing which clinched my power, as I thought, should have destroyed it? Are not those people fools, who lay down rules for human action? Why, no. They are possibly right five times out of ten. But as for the other five! Bah!"

"No, I won't allow that. It was my own fault. I should have known his character better. But there, I could not have helped it, for he did it himself. I was passive."

And Cuthbert followed Marston into the hall, and said, "You are not going away because William goes, Marston?"

"Do you want me?" said Marston.

"Yes," said Cuthbert. "You must stay with me. My time is short, and I must know as much of this world as I may. I have much to do; you must help me. I will be like a little child in your hands. I will die in the old faith, but I will learn something new."

And so Marston stayed with him, and they two grew fast friends. Cuthbert had nothing to learn in this management of his estate; there he was Marston's master; but all that a shrewd young man of the world could teach a bookworm, so much Cuthbert got from Marston.

Marston one day met the village doctor, the very man whom we saw at the beginning of the book, putting out William (whom we then supposed to be Charles) to nurse. Marston asked him, "Was there any reality in this heart-complaint of Cuthbert's?"

"Not the very faintest shadow of a reality," said the doctor. "It is the most tiresome whimsy I ever knew. He has persuaded himself of it, though. He used to be very hypochondriac. He is as likely to live till eighty as you are."

CHAPTER XVII.

A MEETING.

THERE was ruin in the Ascot family, we know. And Lord Ascot, crippled with paralysis at six-and-forty, was lying in South Audley Street, nursed by Lady Ascot. The boxes, which we saw packed ready for their foreign tour at the London Bridge Hotel, were still there—not gone abroad yet, for the simple reason that Herodias had won the Oaks, and that Lord Welter had won, some said seven, others said seventy thousand pounds. (He had really won nine.) So the boxes might stay where they were a few days, and he might pursue his usual avocations in peace, all his debts of honour being satisfied.

He had barely saved himself from being posted. Fortunately for him, he had, on the Derby, betted chiefly with a few friends, one of whom was Hornby; and they waited and said nothing till after the Oaks, when they were paid, and Welter could hold up his head again. He was indebted to the generosity of Hornby and Sir Charles Ferrers for his honour—the very men whom he would have swindled. But he laughed and ate his dinner, and said they were good fellows, and thought no more of it.

The bailiffs were at Ranford. The servants were gone, and the horses were advertised at Tattersall's already. It was reported in the county that an aged Jew, being in possession, and prowling about the premises, had come into the poultry yard, and had surreptitiously slain, cooked, and essayed to eat, the famous cock "Sampson," the champion bird of England, since his match with "Young Countryman." On being informed by the old keeper that my lord had refused sixty guineas for him a few weeks before, he had (so said the county) fled out of the house, tearing his hair, and knocked old Lady Hainault, who had also come prowling over in her pony-carriage, down the steps, flat on her back. Miss Hicks, who was behind with her shawls, had picked her up, they said, and "caught it."

If Adelaide was beautiful everywhere, surely she was more beautiful on horseback than anywhere else, and no one knew it better than herself. She was one of the first who appeared in the park in a low-crowned hat—a "wide-awake." They are not *de rigueur* even yet, I believe; but Adelaide was never very particular so long as she could look well. She had found out how splendid her perfect mask looked under the careless, irregular curves of such a head-dress, and how bright her banded hair shone in contrast with a black ostrich feather which drooped on her shoulder. And so she had taken to wear one since she had been Lady Welter, and had appeared in the park in it twice.

Lord Welter bethought himself once in these times—

that is, just after the Oaks—that he would like to take his handsome wife out and show her in the park. His Hornby speculation had turned out ill; in fact, Hornby had altogether made rather a handsome sum out of him, and he must look for some one else. The some one else, a young Austrian, Pscechenyi by name, a young fellow of wealth, had received his advances somewhat coldly, and it became necessary to hang out Adelaide as a lure.

Lord Welter was aware that, if he had asked Adelaide to come and ride with him, on the ground of giving her an afternoon's amusement, and tried to persuade her to it by fair-spoken common-places, she would probably not have come; and so he did nothing of the kind. He and his wife thoroughly understood one another. There was perfect confidence between them in everything. Towards one another they were perfectly sincere, and this very sincerity begot a feeling of trust between them, which ultimately ripened into something better. They began life together without any professions of affection; but out of use, and a similarity of character, there grew a liking in the end. She knew everything about Lord Welter, save one thing, which she was to know immediately, and which was of no importance; and she was always ready to help him, provided, as she told him, "he didn't humbug," which his lordship, as we know, was not inclined to do, without her caution.

Lord Welter went into her dressing-room in the morning, and said—

"Here's a note from Pscechenyi. He won't come to-night."

"Indeed!" said Adelaide, brushing her hair. "I did not give him credit for so much sense. Really, you know, he can't be such a fool as he looks."

"We must have him," said Lord Welter.

"Of course we must," said Adelaide. "I really cannot allow such a fat goose to run about with a knife and fork in him any longer. Heigh ho! Let's see. He affects Lady Brittlejug, don't he? I am going to her party to-night, and I'll capture him for you, and bring him home to you from under her very nose. Now do try and make a better hand of him than you did of Hornby, or we shall all be in the workhouse together."

"I'll do my best," said Lord Welter, laughing. "But look here. I don't think you'll catch him so, you know. She looks as well as you by candlelight, but she can't ride a hang. Come out in the park this afternoon. He will be there."

"Very well," said Adelaide; "I suppose you know best. I shall be glad of a ride. Half-past two, then."

So at the time appointed these two innocent lambkins rode forth to take the air. Lord Welter, big, burly, red-faced, good humoured, perfectly dressed, and sitting on his horse as few others could sit, the model of a frank English nobleman. Adelaide, beautiful and fragile beyond description, perfect in dress and carriage, riding trustingly and lovingly in the shadow of her lord, the happy, timid bride all over. They had no groom.

What should a poor simple couple like them want with a groom? It was a beautiful sight, and many turned to look at them.

But Lord Saltire, who was looking out of the drawing-room window of Lord Ascot's house in South Audley Street, as they passed, turned to Marston, and said very emphatically—

"Now, I do really wonder what infernal mischief those two are after. There is an air of pastoral simplicity about their whole get-up, which forebodes some very great—very great"—here he paused, took snuff, and looked Marston straight in the face—"obliquity of moral purpose."

Meanwhile, the unconscious innocents sauntered on into the park, under the Marble Arch, and down towards Rotten-row. When they got into the Row they had a canter. There was Pscechenyi riding with Hornby and Miss Buckjumper, but they gave them the "go by," and went softly on towards Kensington-gate. "Who is the woman in the hat and feathers?" said everybody who didn't know. "Lady Welter," said everybody who did; and, whatever else they said of her, they all agreed that she was wonderfully beautiful, and rode divinely. When they came slowly back, they found Hornby and the Austrian were standing against the rail talking to some ladies. They drew close up, and entered into conversation. And Adelaide found herself beside Miss Buckjumper, now Lady Handlycross.

Adelaide was somewhat pleased to find herself at the

side of this famous horsewoman and beauty. She was so sure that comparisons would be favourable to herself. And they were. If ever an exquisitely formed nose was, so to speak, put out of joint, that nose was in the middle of Miss Buckjumper's face that day. Nevertheless, she did not show anything. She had rather a respect for Adelaide, as being a successful woman. Was not she herself cantering for a coronet? There was very soon a group round them, and Lord Welter's hoarse jolly laugh was heard continually. People, who were walking in the park to see the great people, paused outside the circle to look at her, and repassed again. Mr. Pelagius J. Bottom, of New York, whose father emigrated to Athens, and made a great fortune at the weaving business in the time of King Theseus, got on a bench, and looked at her through a double-barrelled opera-glass. There never was such a success. The Austrian thought no more of Hornby's cautions, thought no more of Miss Buckjumper or Lady Brittlejug. He was desperately in love, and was dying for some excuse to withdraw his refusal of this morning. Pelagius Jas. Bottom would have come, and mortgaged the paternal weaving business at the dice, but unfortunately his letters of introduction, being all addressed to respectable people, did not include one to Lord and Lady Welter. All the young fellows would have come and played all night, till church-time next morning, for her sake. As Lord Welter candidly told her that night, she was the best investment he had ever made.

They did not want all the young fellows though. Too many cooks spoil the broth. They only wanted the young Austrian, and so Lord Welter said, after a time, "I was in hopes of seeing you at my house to-night." That was quite enough. Fifty Hornbys would not have stopped him now.

Still they stood there talking. Adelaide was almost happy. Which of these staid women had such power as she? There was a look of pride and admiration even on Lord Welter's stupid face. Yes, it was a great success. Suddenly all people began to look one way and come towards the rails, and a buzz arose, "The Queen—the Queen!"

Adelaide turned just as the outriders were opposite to her. She saw the dark claret-coloured carriage, fifty yards off, and she knew that Lady Emily Montford, who had been her sister-bridesmaid at Lady Hainault's wedding, was in waiting that day. Hornby declares the whole thing was done on purpose. Let us be more charitable, and suppose that her horse was startled at the scarlet coats of the outriders; however it was, the brute took fright, stood on its hind legs, and bolted straight towards the royal carriage. She reined it up within ten feet of the carriage step, plunging furiously. Raising her whip hand to push her hat more firmly on, she knocked it off, and sat there bareheaded, with one loop of her hair fallen down, a sight which no man who saw it ever forgot. She saw a look of amazed admiration in the Queen's face. She saw Lady Emily's look of

gentle pity. She saw her Majesty lean forward, and ask who it was. She saw her name pass Lady Emily's lips, and then she saw the Queen turn with a frown, and looking steadily the other way.

Wrath and rage were in her heart, and showed themselves one instant in her face. A groom had run out and picked up her hat. She bent down to take it from him, and saw that it was Charles Ravenshoe.

Her face grew soft again directly. Poor thing! she must have had a kind heart after all, crusted over as it was with vanity, pride, and selfishness. Now, in her anger and shame, she could have cried to see her old love so degraded. There was no time for crying, or for saying more than a few sharp words, for they were coming towards her.

"What nonesense is this, Charles?" she said. "What is this masquerade? Are you come to double my shame? Go home and take that dress off and burn it. Is your pride dead, that you disgrace yourself like this in public? If you are desperate, as you seem, why are you not at the war? They want desperate men there. Oh! if I was a man!"

They parted then; no one but Lord Welter and Hornby knew who Charles was. The former saw that Adelaide had recognised him, and, as they rode simply home together, said—

"I knew poor Charles was a groom. He saw his sister the other night at our house. I didn't tell you; I hardly know why. I really believe, do you know,

that the truth of the matter is, Adelaide, that I did not want to vex you. Now!"

He looked at her as if he thought she would disbelieve him, but she said—

"Nay, I do believe you, Welter. You are not an ill-natured man, but you are selfish and unprincipled. So am I, perhaps to a greater extent than you. At what time is that fool of a German coming?"

"At half-past eleven."

"I must go to that woman Brittlejug's party. I must show there, to keep friends with her. She has such a terrible tongue. I will be back by twelve or so."

"I wish you could stay at home."

"I really dare not, my dear Welter. I must go. I will be back in good time."

"Of course you will please yourself about it," said Lord Welter, a thought sulkily. And, when he was by himself, he said—

"She is going to see Charles Ravenshoe. Well, perhaps she ought. She treated him d—d bad! And so did I."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER MEETING.

Lord Ascot had been moved into South Audley Street, his town house, and Lady Ascot was there nursing him. General Mainwaring was off for Varna. But Lord Saltire had been a constant visitor, bringing with him very often Marston, who was, you will remember, an old friend of Lady Ascot.

It was not at all an unpleasant house to be in. Lord Ascot was crippled—he had been seized with paralysis at Epsom; and he was ruined. But every one knew the worst, and felt relieved by thinking that things could get no worse than worst, and so must get better.

In fact, every one admitted to the family party about that time remembered it as a very happy and quiet time indeed. Lord Ascot was their first object, of course; and a more gentle and biddable invalid than the poor fellow made can hardly be conceived. He was passionately fond of reading novels (a most reprehensible practice), and so was easily amused. Lord Saltire and he would play picquet; and every evening there would be three hours of whist, until the doctor looked in the last thing, and Lord Ascot was helped to bed.

Marston was always set to play with Lord Ascot,

because Lord Saltire and Lady Ascot would not play against one another. Lord Saltire was, of course, one of the best players in Europe; and I really believe that Lady Ascot was not the worst by any means. I can see the party now. I can see Lady Ascot laying down a card, and looking at the same time at her partner, to call his attention to her lead. And I can see Lord Saltire take out his snuff-box thereat, as if he were puzzled, but not alarmed. William would come sometimes and sit quietly behind Marston, or Lord Saltire, watching the game. In short, they were a very quiet pleasant party indeed.

One night—it was the very night on which Adelaide had lost her hat in the Park—there was no whist. Marston had gone down to Oxford suddenly, and William came in to tell them so. Lady Ascot was rather glad, she said, for she had a friend coming to tea, who did not play whist; so Lord Saltire and Lord Ascot sat down to picquet, and William talked to his aunt.

"Who is your friend, Maria?" asked Lord Saltire.

"A Mr. Bidder, a minister. He has written a book on the Revelations, which you really ought to read, James; it would suit you."

They both laughed.

"About the seven seals, hey?" said Lord Saltire; "'*septem phocæ*,' as I remember Machynleth translated it at Eton once. We called him 'Vitulina' ever after. The name stuck to him through life with some of us. A capital name for him, too! His fussy blundering in

this war-business is just like his old headlong way of looking out words in his dictionary. He is an ass, Maria; and I will bet fifty pounds that your friend, the minister, is another."

"How can you know? at all events, the man he brings with him is none."

"Another minister?"

"Yes, a Moravian missionary from Australia."

"Then certainly another ass, or he would have gone as missionary to a less abominably detestable hole. They were all burnt into the sea there the other day. Immediately after which the rivers rose seventy feet, and drowned the rest of them."

Soon after were announced Mr. Bidder and Mr. Smith. Mr. Bidder was an entirely unremarkable man; but Mr. Smith was one of the most remarkable men I have ever seen, or rather heard—for externally there was nothing remarkable about him, except a fine forehead, and a large expressive grey eye, which, when he spoke to you, seemed to come back from a long distance, and fix itself upon yours. In manners he was perfect. He was rather taciturn, though always delighted to communicate information about his travels, in a perfectly natural way. If one man wanted information on botany, or what not, he was there to give it. If another wanted to hear about missionary work, he was ready for him. He never spoke or acted untruthfully for one instant. He never acted the free and easy man of the world, as some religious gentlemen of all sects feel it necessary to do

sometimes, imitating the real thing as well as Paul Bedford would imitate Fanny Ellsler. What made him remarkable was his terrible earnestness, and the feeling you had, that his curious language was natural, and meant something; something very important indeed.

He has something to do with the story. The straws in the gutter have to do with the history of a man like Charles, a man who leaves all things to chance. And this man Smith is very worthy of notice, and so I have said thus much about him, and am going to say more.

Mr. Bidder was very strong on the Russian war, which he illustrated by the Revelations. He was a good fellow, and well-bred enough to see that his friend Smith was an object of greater interest to Lady Ascot than himself; so he "retired into" a book of prints, and left the field clear.

Mr. Smith sat by Lady Ascot, and William drew close up. Lady Ascot began by a common-place, of course.

"You have suffered great hardships among those savages, Mr. Smith, have you not?"

"Hardships! Oh, dear no, my dear lady. Our station was one of the pleasantest places in the whole earth, I believe; and we had a peaceful time. When the old man is strong in me I wish I was back there."

"You did not make much progress with them, I believe?"

"None whatever. We found out after a year or two that it was hopeless to make them understand the exist-

ence of a God; and after that we stayed on to see if we could bring them to some knowledge of agriculture, and save them from their inevitable extermination, as the New Zealanders have been saved."

"And to no purpose?"

"None. For instance, we taught them to plant our potatoes for us. They did it beautifully, but in the night they dug them up and ate them. And in due season we waited that our potatoes should grow, and they grew not. Then they came to Brother Hillyar, my coadjutor, an old man, now ruling ten cities for his master, and promised for rewards of flour to tell him why the potatoes did not grow. And he, loving them, gave them what they desired. And they told him that they dug them up while we slept. And for two days I went about my business laughing in secret places, for which he tried to rebuke me, but could not, laughing himself. The Lord kept him waiting long, for he was seventy-four; but, doubtless, his reward is the greater."

William said, "You brought home a collection of zoological specimens, I think. They are in the Museum."

"Yes. But what I could not bring over were my live pets. I and my wife had a menagerie of our own—a great number of beasts—"

Mr. Bidder looking up from his book, catching the last sentence only, said that the number of the beast was 666; and, then turning round, held himself ready to strike into the conversation, thinking that the time was come when he should hide his light no longer.

"The natives are very low savages, are they not, Mr. Smith?" said William. "I have heard that they cannot count above ten."

"Not so far as that," said Mr. Smith. "The tribe we were most among used to express all large unknown quantities by 'eighty-four;'[1] it was as x and y to them. That seems curious at first, does it not?"

William said it did seem curious, their choosing that particular number. But Mr. Bidder, dying to mount his hobby-horse, and not caring how, said it was not at all curious. If you multiplied the twelve tribes of Israel into the seven cities of refuge, there you were at once.

Mr. Smith said he thought he had made a little mistake. The number, he fancied, was ninety-four.

Lord Saltire, from the card-table, said that that made the matter clearer than before. For if you placed the Ten Commandments to the previous result you arrived at ninety-four, which was the number wanted. And his lordship, who had lost, and was consequently possibly cross, added that, if you divided the whole by the five foolish virgins, and pitched Tobit's dog neck and heels, into the result, you would find yourself much about where you started.

Mr. Bidder, who, as I said, was a good fellow, laughed,

[1] A fact with regard to one tribe, to the author's frequent confusion. Any number above two, whether of horses, cattle, or sheep, was always represented as being eighty-four. Invariably, too, with an adjective introduced after the word "four," which we don't use in a drawing-room.

and Mr. Smith resumed the conversation once more; Lord Saltire seemed interested in what he said, and did not interfere with him.

"You buried poor Mrs. Smith out there," said Lady Ascot. "I remember her well. She was very beautiful as a girl."

"Very beautiful," said the missionary. "Yes; she never lost her beauty, do you know. That climate is very deadly to those who go there with the seeds of consumption in them. She had done a hard day's work before she went to sleep, though she was young. Don't you think so, Lady Ascot?"

"A hard day's work; a good day's work, indeed. Who knows better than I?" said Lady Ascot. "What an awaking it must be from such a sleep as hers!"

"Beyond the power of human tongue to tell," said the missionary, looking dreamily as at something far away. "Show me the poet that can describe in his finest language the joy of one's soul when one wakes on a summer's morning. Who, then, can conceive or tell the unutterable happiness of the purified soul, waking face to face with the King of Glory?"

Lord Saltire looked at him curiously, and said to himself, "This fellow is in earnest. I have seen this sort of thing before. But seldom! Yes, but seldom!"

"I should not have alluded to my wife's death," continued the missionary in a low voice, "but that her ladyship introduced the subject. And no one has a better right to hear of her than her kind old friend.

She fell asleep on the Sabbath evening after prayers. We moved her bed into the verandah, Lady Ascot, that she might see the sunlight fade out on the tops of the highest trees—a sight she always loved. And from the verandah we could see through the tree stems Mount Joorma, laid out in endless folds of woodland, all purple and gold. And I thought she was looking at the mountain, but she was looking far beyond that, for she said, 'I shall have to wait thirty years for you, James, but I shall be very happy and very busy. The time will go quick enough for me, but it will be a slow weary time for you, my darling. Go home from here, my love, into the great towns, and see what is to be done there.' And so she went to sleep.

"I rebelled for three days. I went away into the bush, with Satan at my elbow all the time, through dry places, through the forest, down by lonely creeksides, up among bald volcanic downs, where there are slopes of slippery turf, leading down to treacherous precipices of slag; and then through the quartz ranges, and the reedy swamps, where the black swans float, and the spur-winged plover hovers and cackles; all about I went among the beasts and the birds. But on the third day the Lord wearied of me, and took me back, and I lay on His bosom again like a child. He will always take you home, my lord, if you come. After three days, after thrice twenty years, my lord. Time is nothing to Him."

Lord Saltire was looking on him with kindly admiration.

"There is something in it, my lord. Depend upon it that it is not all a dream. Would not you give all your amazing wealth, all your honours, everything, to change places with me?"

"I certainly would," said Lord Saltire. "I have always been of opinion that there was something in it. I remember," he continued, turning to William, "expressing the same opinion to your father in the Fleet Prison once, when he had quarrelled with the priests for expressing some opinions which he had got from me. But you must take up with that sort of thing very early in life if you mean it to have any reality at all. I am too old now."[1]

Lord Saltire said this in a different tone from his usual one. In a tone that we have never heard him use before. There was something about the man Smith which, in spite of his quaint language, softened every one who heard him speak. Lady Ascot says it was the grace of God. I entirely agree with her ladyship.

"I came home," concluded the missionary, "to try some city work. My wife's nephew, John Marston, whom I expected to see here to-night, is going to assist

[1] Once for all, let me call every honest reader to witness, that, unless I speak in the first person, I am not bound to the opinions of any one of the characters in this book. I have merely made people speak as I think they would have spoken. Even in a story, consisting so entirely of incident as this, I feel it necessary to say so much, for no kind of unfairness is so common as that of identifying the opinions of a story-teller with those of his *dramatis personæ*.

me in this work. There seems plenty to do. We are at work in Southwark at present."

Possibly it was well that the company, more particularly Lady Ascot, were in a softened and forgiving mood. For, before any one had resumed the conversation, Lord Ascot's valet stood in the door, and, looking at Lady Ascot with a face which said as plain as words, "It is a terrible business, my lady, but I am innocent," announced—

"Lady Welter."

Lord Saltire put his snuff-box into his right-hand trousers' pocket, and his pocket handkerchief into his left, and kept his hands there, leaning back in his chair, with his legs stretched out, and a smile of infinite wicked amusement on his face. Lord Ascot and William stared like a couple of gabies. Lady Ascot had no time to make the slightest change, either in feature or position, before Adelaide, dressed for the evening in a cloud of white and pink, with her bare arms loaded with bracelets, a swansdown fan hanging from her left wrist, sailed swiftly into the room, with outstretched hands, bore down on Lady Ascot, and began kissing her, as though the old lady were a fruit of some sort, and she were a dove pecking at it.

"Dearest grandma!"—peck. "So glad to see you!"—peck. "Couldn't help calling in on you as I went to Lady Brittlejug's—and how well you are looking!"—peck, peck. "I can spare ten minutes—do tell me all the news, since I saw you. My dear Lord Ascot, I was

so sorry to hear of your illness, but you look better than I expected. And how do *you* do, my dear Lord Saltire?"

Lord Saltire was pretty well, and was delighted to see Lady Welter apparently in the enjoyment of such health and spirits, and so on, aloud. But, secretly, Lord Saltire was wondering what on earth could have brought her here. Perhaps she only wanted to take Lady Ascot by surprise, and force her into a recognition of her as Lady Welter. No. My lord saw there was something more than that. She was restless and absent with Lady Ascot. Her eye kept wandering, in the middle of all her rattling talk; but, wherever it wandered, it always came back to William, of whom she had hitherto taken no notice whatever.

"She has come after him. For what?" thought my lord. "I wonder if the jade knows anything of Charles."

Lady Ascot had steeled herself against this meeting. She had determined, firstly, that no mortal power should ever induce her to set eyes on Adelaide again; and, secondly, that she, Lady Ascot, would give her, Adelaide, a piece of her mind, which she should never forget to her dying day. The first of these, rather contradictory, determinations had been disposed of by Adelaide's audacity; and, as for the second; why, the piece of Lady Ascot's mind which was to be given to Adelaide was, somehow, not ready; but, instead of it, only silent tears, and withered, trembling fingers, which

wandered lovingly over the beautiful young hand, and made the gaudy bracelets on the wrist click one against the other.

"What could I say, Brooks? what could I do?" said Lady Ascot to her maid that night, "when I saw her own self come back, with her own old way? I love the girl more than ever, Brooks, I believe. She beat me. She took me by surprise. I could not resist her. If she had proposed to put me in a wheelbarrow, and wheel me into the middle of that disgraceful, that detestable woman, Brittlejug's drawing-room, there and then, I should have let her do it, I believe. I might have begged for time to put on my bonnet; but I should have gone."

She sat there ten minutes or more, talking. Then she said that it was time to go, but that she should come and see Lady Ascot on the morrow. Then she turned to William, to whom she had not been introduced, and asked, would he see her to her carriage? Lord Saltire was next the bell, and, looking her steadily in the face, raised his hand slowly to pull it. Adelaide begged him eagerly not to trouble himself; he, with a smile, promptly dropped his hand, and out she sailed on William's arm, Lord Saltire holding the door open, and shutting it after her, with somewhat singular rapidity.

"I hope none of those fools of servants will come blundering upstairs before she has said her say," he remarked aloud. "Give us some of your South

African experiences, Mr. Smith. Did you ever see a woman beautiful enough to go clip a lion's claws single-handed, eh?"

William, convoying Adelaide downstairs, had got no further than the first step, when he felt her hand drawn from his arm; he had got one foot on the step below, when he turned to see the cause of this. Adelaide was standing on the step above him, with her glorious face bent sternly, almost fiercely, down on his, and the hand from which the fan hung pointed towards him. It was as beautiful a sight as he had ever seen, and he calmly wondered what it meant. The perfect mouth was curved in scorn, and from it came sharp ringing words, decisive, hard, clear, like the sound of a hammer on an anvil.

"Are you a party to this shameful business, sir? you, who have taken his name, and his place, and his prospects in society. You, who professed, as I hear, to love him like another life, dearer than your own. You, who lay on the same breast with him—tell me, in God's name, that you are sinning in ignorance."

William, as I have remarked before, had a certain amount of shrewdness. He determined to let her go on. He only said, "You are speaking of Charles Ravenshoe."

"Ay," she said sharply; "of Charles Ravenshoe, sir—ex-stable-boy. I came here to-night to beard them all; to ask them, did they know, and did they dare to suffer it. If they had not given me an answer, I would have said such things to them as would have made them

stop their ears. Lord Saltire has a biting tongue, has he? Let him hear what mine is. But, when I saw you among them, I determined to save a scene, and speak to you alone. Shameful—"

William looked quietly at her. "Will your ladyship remark that I, that all of us, have been moving heaven and earth to find Charles Ravenshoe, and that we have been utterly unable to find him? If you have any information about him, would it not be as well to consider that the desperation caused by your treatment of him was the principal cause of his extraordinary resolution of hiding himself? And, instead of scolding me and others, who are doing all we can, to give us all the information in your power?"

"Well, well," she said, "perhaps you are right. Consider me rebuked, will you have the goodness? I saw Charles Ravenshoe to-day."

"To-day!"

"Ay, and talked to him."

"How did he look? was he pale? was he thin? Did he seem to want money? Did he ask after me? Did he send any message? Can you take me to where he is? Did he seem much broken down? Does he know we have been seeking him? Lady Welter, for God's sake, do something to repair the wrong you did him, and take me to where he is."

"I don't know where he is, I tell you. I saw him for just one moment. He picked up my hat in the Park. He was dressed like a groom. He came from I

know not where, like a ghost from the grave. He did not speak to me. He gave me my hat, and was gone. I do not know whose groom he is, but I think Welter knows. He will tell me to-night. I dared not ask him to-day, lest he should think I was going to see him. When I tell him where I have been, and describe what has passed here, he will tell me. Come to me to-morrow morning, and he shall tell you; that will be better. You have sense enough to see why."

"I see."

"Another thing. He has seen his sister Ellen. And yet another thing. When I ran away with Lord Welter, I had no idea of what had happened to him—of this miserable *esclandre*. But you must have known that before, if you were inclined to do me justice. Come to-morrow morning. I must go now."

And so she went to her carriage by herself after all. And William stood still on the stairs, triumphant. Charles was as good as found.

The two clergymen passed him on their way downstairs, and bade him good night. Then he returned to the drawing-room, and said—

"My lord, Lady Welter has seen Charles to-day, and spoken to him. With God's help, I will have him here with us to-morrow night."

It was half-past eleven. What Charles, in his headlong folly and stupidity, had contrived to do before this time, must be told in another chapter—no, I have not patience to wait. My patience is exhausted. One

act of folly following another so fast would exhaust the patience of Job. If one did not love him so well, one would not be so angry with him. I will tell it here and have done with it. When he had left Adelaide, he had gone home with Hornby. He had taken the horses to the stable; he had written a note to Hornby. Then he had packed up a bundle of clothes, and walked quietly off.

Round by St. Peter's Church—he had no particular reason for going there, except, perhaps, that his poor foolish heart yearned that evening to see some one who cared for him, though it were only a shoeblack. There was still one pair of eyes which would throw a light for one instant into the thick darkness which was gathering fast around him.

His little friend was there. Charles and he talked for a while, and at last he said—

"You will not see me again. I am going to the war. I am going to Windsor to enlist in the Hussars to-night."

"They will kill you," said the boy.

"Most likely," said Charles. "So we must say good-bye. Mind, now, you go to the school at night, and say that prayer I gave you on the paper. We must say good-bye. We had better be quick about it."

The boy looked at him steadily. Then he began to draw his breath in long sighs—longer, longer yet, till his chest seemed bursting. Then out it all came in a furious hurricane of tears, and he leant his head against the wall, and beat the bricks with his clenched hand.

"And I am never to see you no more! no more! no more!"

"No more," said Charles. But he thought he might soften the poor boy's grief; and he did think, too, at the moment, that he would go and see the house where his kind old aunt lived, before he went away for ever; so he said—

"I shall be in South Audley Street, 167, to-morrow at noon. Now, you must not cry, my dear. You must say good-bye."

And so he left him, thinking to see him no more. Once more, Charles, only once more, and then God help you!

He went off that night to Windsor, and enlisted in the 140th Hussars.

CHAPTER XIX.

HALF A MILLION.

AND so you see here we are all at sixes and sevens once more. Apparently as near the end of the story, as when I wrote the adventures of Alured Ravenshoe at the court of Henry the Eighth in the very first chapter. If Charles had had a little of that worthy's impudence, instead of being the shy, sensitive fellow he was, why, the story would have been over long ago. In point of fact, I don't know that it would ever have been written at all. So it is best as it is for all parties.

Although Charles had enlisted in Hornby's own regiment, he had craftily calculated that there was not the slightest chance of Hornby's finding it out for some time. Hornby's troop was at the Regent's Park. The head-quarters were at Windsor, and the only officer likely to recognise him was Hornby's captain. And so he went to work at his new duties with an easy mind, rather amused than otherwise, and wondering where and when it would all end.

From sheer unadulterated ignorance, I cannot follow him during the first week or so of his career. I have a suspicion, almost amounting to certainty, that, if I could, I should not. I do not believe that the readers

of Ravenshoe would care to hear about sword-exercise, riding-school, stableguard, and so on. I can, however, tell you thus much, that Charles learnt his duties in a wonderfully short space of time, and was a great favourite with high and low.

When William went to see Adelaide by appointment the morning after his interview with her, he had an interview with Lord Welter, who told him, in answer to his inquiries, that Charles was groom to Lieutenant Hornby.

"I promised that I would say nothing about it," he continued; "but I think I ought: and Lady Welter has been persuading me to do so, if any inquiries were made, only this morning. I am deuced glad, Ravenshoe, that none of you have forgotten him. It would be a great shame if you had. He is a good fellow, and has been infernally used by some of us—by me, for instance."

William, in his gladness, said, "Never mind, my lord; let bygones be bygones. We shall all be to one another as we were before, please God. I have found Charles, at all events; so there is no gap in the old circle, except my father's. I had a message for Lady Welter."

"She is not down; she is really not well this morning, or she could have seen you."

"It is only this. Lady Ascot begs that she will come over to lunch. My aunt wished she would have stopped longer last night."

"Your aunt?"

"My aunt, Lady Ascot."

"Ah! I beg pardon; I am not quite used to the new state of affairs. Was Lady Welter with Lady Ascot last night?"

William was obliged to say yes, but felt as if he had committed an indiscretion by having said anything about it.

"The deuce she was!" said Lord Welter. "I thought she was somewhere else. Tell my father that I will come and see him to-day, if he don't think it would be too much for him."

"Ah, Lord Welter! you would have come before, if you had known—"

"I know, I know. You must know that I had my reasons for not coming. Well, I hope that you and I will be better acquainted in our new positions; we were intimate enough in our old."

When William was gone, Lord Welter went up to his wife's dressing-room, and said—

"Lady Welter, you are a jewel. If you go on like this, you will be recognised, and we shall die at Ranford —you and I—a rich and respectable couple. If 'ifs and ands were pots and pans,' Lady Welter, we should do surprisingly well. If, for instance, Lord Saltire could be got to like me something better than a mad dog, he would leave my father the whole of his landed estate, and cut Charles Horton, whilom Ravenshoe, off with the comparatively insignificant sum of eighty thousand pounds, the amount of his funded property. Eh! Lady Welter."

Adelaide actually bounded from her chair.

"Are you drunk, Welter?" she said.

"Seeing that it is but the third hour of the day, I am not, Lady Welter. Neither am I a fool. Lord Saltire would clear my father now, if he did not know that it would be more for my benefit than his. I believe he would sooner leave his money to a hospital than see me get one farthing of it."

"Welter," said Adelaide, eagerly, "if Charles gets hold of Lord Saltire again, he will have the whole; the old man adores him. I know it; I see it all now; why did I never think of it before? He thinks he is like Lord Barkham, his son. There is time yet. If that man, William Ravenshoe, comes this morning, you must know nothing of Charles. Mind that. Nothing. They must not meet. He may forget him. Mind, Welter, no answer!"

She was walking up and down the room rapidly now, and Lord Welter was looking at her with a satirical smile on his face.

"Lady Welter," he said, "the man, William Ravenshoe, has been here, and has got his answer. By this time, Charles is receiving his lordship's blessing."

"Fool!" was all that Adelaide could say.

"Well, hardly that," said Lord Welter. "At least, *you* should hardly call me so. I understood the position of affairs long before you. I was a reckless young cub not to have paid Lord Saltire more court in old times; but I never knew the state of our affairs till very shortly

before the crash came, or I might have done so. In the present case, I have not been such a fool. Charles is restored to Lord Saltire through my instrumentality. A very good basis of operations, Lady Welter."

"At a risk of about half a million of money," remarked Adelaide.

"There was no risk in the other course, certainly," said Lord Welter, "for we should never have seen a farthing of it. And besides, Lady Welter—"

"Well!"

"I have your attention. Good. It may seem strange to you, who care about no one in heaven or earth, but I love this fellow, this Charles Horton. I always did. He is worth all the men I ever met put together. I am glad to have been able to give him a lift this morning. Even if I had not been helping myself, I should have done it all the same. That is comical, is it not? For Lord Saltire's landed property I shall fight. The campaign begins at lunch to-day, Lady Welter; so, if you will be so good as to put on your full war-paint and feathers, we will dig up the tomahawk, and be off on the war-trail in your ladyship's brougham. Good-bye for the present."

Adelaide was beaten. She was getting afraid of her husband; afraid of his strong masculine cunning, of his reckless courage, and of the strange apparition of a great brutal *heart* at the bottom of it all. What were all her fine-spun female cobwebs worth against such a huge, blundering, thieving, hornet as he?

CHAPTER XX.

TO LUNCH WITH LORD ASCOT.

THAT same day, Lord Saltire and Lady Ascot were sitting in the drawing-room window, in South Audley Street, alone. He had come in, as his custom was, about eleven, and found her reading her great old Bible; he had taken up the paper and read away for a time, saying that he would not interrupt her; she, too, had seemed glad to avoid a *tête-à-tête* conversation, and had continued; but, after a few minutes, he had dropped the paper, and cried—

"The deuce!"

"My dear James," said she, "what is the matter?"

"Matter! why, we have lost a war-steamer, almost without a shot fired. The Russians have got the *Tiger*, crew and all. It is unbearable, Maria; if they are going to blunder like this at the beginning, where will it end?"

Lord Saltire was disgusted with the war from the very beginning, in consequence of the French alliance, and so the present accident was as fuel for his wrath. Lady Ascot, as loyal a soul as lived, was possibly rather glad that something had taken up Lord Saltire's attention just then, for she was rather afraid of him this morning.

She knew his great dislike for Lord Welter, and expected to be scolded for her weakness with regard to Adelaide the night before. Moreover, she had the guilty consciousness that she had asked Adelaide to come to lunch that morning, of which he did not yet know. So she was rather glad to have a subject to talk of, not personal.

"And when did it happen, my dear James?" she asked.

"On the twelfth of last month, Lady Ascot. Come and sit here in the window, and give an account of yourself, will you have the goodness?"

Now that she saw it must come, she was as cool and as careless as need be. He could not be hard on her. Charles was to come home to them that day. She drew her chair up, and laid her withered old hand on his, and the two grey heads were bent together. Grey heads but green hearts.

"Look at old Daventry," said Lord Saltire, "on the other side of the way. Don't you see him, Maria, listening to that organ? He is two years older than I am. He looks younger."

"I don't know that he does. He ought to look older. She led him a terrible life. Have you been to see him lately?"

"What business is that of yours? So you are going to take Welter's wife back into your good graces, eh, my lady?"

"Yes, James."

"'Yes, James!'—I have no patience with you. You are weaker than water. Well, well, we must forgive her, I suppose. She has behaved generous enough about Charles, has she not? I rather admire her scolding poor William Ravenshoe. I must renew our acquaintance."

"She is coming to lunch to-day."

"I thought you looked guilty. Is Welter coming?"

Lady Ascot made no reply. Neither at that moment would Lord Saltire have heard her if she had. He was totally absorbed in the proceedings of his old friend Lord Daventry, before mentioned. That venerable dandy had listened to the organ until the man had played all his tunes twice through, when he had given him half a crown, and the man had departed. Immediately afterwards, a Punch and Judy had come, which Punch and Judy was evidently an acquaintance of his; for, on descrying him, it had hurried on with its attendant crowd, and breathlessly pitched itself in front of him, let down its green curtains, and plunged at once *in medias res*. The back of the show was towards Lord Saltire; but, just as he saw Punch look round the corner, to see which way the Devil was gone, he saw two pickpockets advance on Lord Daventry from different quarters, with fell intentions. They met at his tail-coat pocket, quarrelled, and fought. A policeman bore down on them; Lord Daventry was still unconscious, staring his eyes out of his head. The affair was becoming exciting, when Lord Saltire felt a warm tear drop on his hand.

"James," said Lady Ascot, "don't be hard on Welter. I love Welter. There is good in him; there is, indeed. I know how shamefully he has behaved; but don't be hard on him, James."

"My dearest Maria," said Lord Saltire, "I would not give you one moment's uneasiness for the world. I do not like Welter. I dislike him. But I will treat him for your sake and Ascot's as though I loved him—there. Now about Charles. He will be with us to-day, thank God. What the deuce are we to do?"

"I cannot conceive," said Lady Ascot; "it is such a terrible puzzle. One does not like to move, and yet it seems such a sin to stand still."

"No answer to your advertisement, of course?" said Lord Saltire.

"None whatever. It seems strange, too, with such a reward as we have offered; but it was worded so cautiously, you see."

Lord Saltire laughed. "Cautiously, indeed. No one could possibly guess what it was about. It was a miracle of obscurity; but it won't do to go any further yet." After a pause, he said—"You are perfectly certain of your facts, Maria, for the fiftieth time."

"Perfectly certain. I committed a great crime, James. I did it for Alicia's sake. Think what my bringing up had been, how young I was, and forgive me if you can; excuse me if you cannot."

"Nonsense about a great crime, Maria. It was a

great mistake, certainly. If you had only the courage to have asked Petre one simple question! Alicia never guessed the fact, of course?"

"Never."

"Do you think, Maria, that by any wild possibility James or Norah knew?"

"How could they possibly? What a foolish question."

"I don't know. Those Roman Catholics do strange things," said Lord Saltire, staring out of window at the crowd.

"If she knew, why did she change the child?"

"Eh?" said Lord Saltire, turning round.

"You have not been attending," said Lady Ascot.

"No, I have not," said Lord Saltire; "I was looking at Daventry."

"Do you still," said Lord Saltire, "since all our researches and failures, stick to the belief that the place was in Hampshire?"

"I do indeed, and in the north of Hampshire too."

"I wonder," said Lord Saltire, turning round suddenly, "whether Mackworth knows?"

"Of course he does," said Lady Ascot, quietly.

"Hum," said Lord Saltire, "I had a hold over that man once; but I threw it away as being worthless. I wish I had made a bargain for my information. But what nonsense; how can he know?"

"Know?" said Lady Ascot, scornfully; "what is there a confessor don't know? Don't tell me that all Mackworth's power came from finding out poor Densil's

faux pas. The man had a sense of power other than that."

"Then he never used it," said Lord Saltire. "Densil, dear soul, never knew."

"I said of *sense* of power," said Lady Ascot, "which gave him his consummate impudence. Densil never dreamt of it."

At this point the policeman had succeeded in capturing the two pickpockets, and was charging them before Lord Daventry. Lord Daventry audibly offered them ten shillings a-piece to say nothing about it; at which the crowd cheered.

"Would it be any use to offer money to the priest—say ten thousand pounds or so?" said Lord Saltire. "You are a religious woman, Maria, and as such are a better judge of a priest's conscience than I. What do you think?"

"I don't know," said Lady Ascot. "I don't know but what the man is high-minded, in his heathenish way. You know Cuthbert's story of his having refused ten thousand pounds to hush up the matter about Charles. His information would be a blow to the Popish Church in the West. He would lose position by accepting your offer. I don't know what his position may be worth. You can try him, if all else fails; not otherwise, I should say. We must have a closer search."

"When you come to think, Maria, he can't know. If Densil did not know, how could he?"

"Old Clifford might have known, and told him."

"If we are successful, and if Adelaide has no children —two improbable things—" said Lord Saltire, "why then—"

"Why, then—" said Lady Ascot. "But at the worst you are going to make Charles a rich man. Shall you tell William?"

"Not yet. Cuthbert should never be told, I say; but that is Charles's business. I have prepared William."

"Cuthbert will not live," said Lady Ascot.

"Not a chance of it, I believe. Marston says his heart-complaint does not exist, but I think differently."

At this moment, Lord Daventry's offer of money having been refused, the whole crowd moved off in procession towards the police-station. First came three little girls with big bonnets and babies, who, trying to do two things at once—to wit, head the procession by superior speed, and at the same time look round at Lord Daventry and the pickpockets—succeeded in neither, but only brought the three babies' heads in violent collision every other step. Next came Lord Daventry, resigned. Next the policeman, with a pickpocket in each hand, who were giving explanations. Next the boys; after them, the Punch and Judy, which had unfortunately seen the attempt made, and must to the station as a witness, to the detriment of business. Bringing up the rear were the British public, who played practical jokes with one another. The dogs kept a parallel course in the gutter, and barked. In

turning the first corner, the procession was cut into, and for a time thrown into confusion, by a light-hearted costermonger, who, returning from a successful market with an empty barrow, drove it in among them with considerable velocity. After which, they disappeared like the baseless fabric of a dream, only to be heard of again in the police reports.

"Lord and Lady Welter."

Lord Saltire had seen them drive up to the door; so he was quite prepared. He had been laughing intensely, but quite silently, at poor Lord Daventry's adventures, and so, when he turned round he had a smile on his face. Adelaide had done kissing Lady Ascot, and was still holding both her hands with a look of intense mournful affection. Lord Saltire was so much amused by Adelaide's acting, and by her simplicity in performing before himself, that, when he advanced to Lord Welter, he was perfectly radiant.

"Well, my dear scapegrace, and how do *you* do?" he said, giving his hand to Lord Welter; "a more ill-mannered fellow I never saw in my life. To go away and hide yourself with that lovely young wife of yours, and leave all us oldsters to bore one another to death. What the deuce do you mean by it? Eh, sir?"

Lord Welter did not reply in the same strain. He said—

"It is very kind of you to receive me like this. I did not expect it. Allow me to tell you, that I think your manner towards me would not be quite so cordial if you

knew everything; there is a great deal that you don't know, and which I don't mean to tell you."

It is sometimes quite impossible, even for a writer of fiction, a man with *carte blanche* in the way of invention, to give the cause for a man's actions. I have thought and thought, and I cannot for the life of me tell you why Lord Welter answered Lord Saltire like that, whether it was from deep cunning or merely from recklessness. If it was cunning, it was cunning of a high order. It was genius. The mixture of respect and kindness towards the person, and of carelessness about his favour was—well—very creditable. Lord Saltire did not think he was acting, and his opinion is of some value, I believe. But then, we must remember that he was prepared to think the best of Lord Welter that day, and must make allowances. I am not prepared with an opinion; let every man form his own. I only know that Lord Saltire tapped his teeth with his snuff-box and remained silent. Lord Welter, whether consciously or no, was nearer the half of a million of money than he had ever been before.

But Adelaide's finer sense was offended at her husband's method of proceeding. For one instant, when she heard him say what he did, she could have killed him. "Reckless, brutal, selfish," she said fiercely to herself, "throwing a duke's fortune to the winds by sheer obstinacy." (At this time she had picked up Lady Ascot's spectacles, and was playfully placing them on her venerable nose.) "I wish I had never seen him. He is

maddening. If he only had some brains, where might not we be?" But the conversation of that morning came to her mind with a jar, and the suspicion with it, that he had more brains of a sort than she; that, though they were on a par in morality, there was a strength about him, against which her finesse was worthless. She knew she could never deceive Lord Saltire, and there was Lord Saltire tapping him on the knee with his snuff-box, and talking earnestly and confidentially to him. She was beginning to respect her husband. *He* dared face that terrible old man with his hundreds of thousands; *she* trembled in his presence.

Let us leave her, fooling our dear old friend to the top of her bent, and hear what the men were saying.

"I know you have been, as they say now, 'very fast,'" said Lord Saltire, drawing nearer to him. I don't want to ask any questions which don't concern me. You have sense enough to know that it is worth your while to stand well with me. Will you answer me a few questions which do concern me?"

"I can make no promises, Lord Saltire. Let me hear what they are, will you?"

"Why," said Lord Saltire, "about Charles Ravenshoe."

"About Charles!" said Lord Welter, looking up at Lord Saltire. "Oh, yes; any number. I have nothing to conceal there. Of course you will know everything. I had sooner you knew it from me than another."

"I don't mean about Adelaide; let that go by.

Perhaps I am glad that that is as it is. But have you known where Charles was lately? Your wife told William to come to her this morning; that is why I ask."

"I have known a very short time. When William Ravenshoe came this morning, I gave him every information. Charles will be with you to-day."

"I am satisfied."

"I don't care to justify myself, but if it had not been for me you would never have seen him. And more. I am not the first man, Lord Saltire, who has done what I have done."

"No, of course not," said Lord Saltire. "I can't fling the first stone at you; God forgive me."

"But you must see, Lord Saltire, that I could not have guessed that Ellen was his sister."

"Hey?" said Lord Saltire. "Say that again."

"I say that, when I took Ellen Horton away from Ravenshoe, I did not know that she was Charles's sister."

Lord Saltire fell back in his chair, and said—

"Good God!"

"It is very terrible, looked at one way, Lord Saltire. If you come to look at it another, it amounts to this, that she was only, as far as I know, a gamekeeper's daughter. Do you remember what you said to Charles and me, when we were rusticated?"

"Yes. I said that one vice was considered more venial than another vice now-a-days; and I say so still.

I had sooner that you had died of delirium tremens in a ditch than done this."

"So had not I, Lord Saltire. When I became involved with Adelaide, I thought Ellen was provided for; I, even then, had not heard this *esclandre* about Charles. She refused a splendid offer of marriage before she left me."

"We thought she was dead. Where is she gone?"

"I have no idea. She refused everything. She stayed on as Adelaide's maid, and left us suddenly. We have lost all trace of her."

"What a miserable, dreadful business!" said Lord Saltire.

"Very so," said Lord Welter. "Hadn't we better change the subject, my lord?" he added drily. "I am not at all sure that I shall submit to much more cross-questioning. You must not push me too far, or I shall get savage."

"I won't," said Lord Saltire. "But, Welter, for God's sake, answer me two more questions. Not offensive ones, on my honour."

"Fifty, if you will; only consider my rascally temper."

"Yes, yes! When Ellen was with you, did she ever hint that she was in possession of any information about the Ravenshoes?"

"Yes; or rather, when she went, she left a letter, and in it she said that she had something to tell Charles."

Good, good!" said Lord Saltire. "She may know.

We must find her. Now, Charles is coming here to-day. Had you better meet him, Welter?"

"We have met before. All that is past is forgiven between us."

"Met!" said Lord Saltire eagerly. "And what did he say to you? Was there a scene, Welter?"

Lord Welter paused before he answered, and Lord Saltire, the wise, looked out of the window. Once Lord Welter seemed going to speak, but there was a catch in his breath. The second attempt was more fortunate. He said, in a low voice—

"Why, I'll tell you, my lord. Charles Ravenshoe is broken-hearted."

"Lord and Lady Hainault."

And Miss Corby, and Gus, and Flora, and Archy, the footman might have added, but was probably afraid of spoiling his period.

It was rather awkward. They were totally unexpected, and Lord Hainault and Lord Welter had not met since Lord Hainault had denounced Lord Welter at Tattersall's. It was so terribly awkward that Lord Saltire recovered his spirits, and looked at the two young men with a smile. The young men disappointed him, however, for Lord Hainault said, "How d'ye do, Welter?" and Lord Welter said, "How do, Hainault?" and the matter was settled, at all events for the present.

When all salutations had been exchanged among the ladies, and Archy had hoisted himself up into Mary's lap, and Lady Hainault had imperially settled herself in

a chair, with Flora at her knee, exactly opposite Adelaide, there was a silence for a moment, during which it became apparent that Gus had a question to ask of Lady Ascot. Mary trembled, but the others were not quite sorry to have the silence broken. Gus, having obtained leave of the house, wished to know, whether or not Satan, should he repent of his sins, would have a chance of regaining his former position?

"That silly Scotch nursemaid has been reading Burns's poems to him, I suppose," said Lady Hainault; unless Mary herself has been doing so. Mary prefers anything to Watts's hymns, Lady Ascot."

"You must not believe one word Lady Hainault says, Lady Ascot," said Mary. "She has been shamefully worsted in an argument, and she is resorting to all sorts of unfair means to turn the scales. I never read a word of Burns's poems in my life."

"You will be pleased not to believe a single word Miss Corby says, Lady Ascot," said Lady Hainault. "She has convicted herself. She sings 'The banks and braes of bonny Doon'—very badly, I will allow, but still she sings it."

There was a laugh at this. Anything was better than the silence which had gone before. It became evident that Lady Hainault would not speak to Adelaide. It was very uncomfortable. Dear Mary would have got up another friendly passage of arms with Lady Hainault, but she was too nervous. She would have even drawn out Gus, but she saw that Gus, dear fellow,

was not in a humour to be trusted that morning. He evidently was aware that the dogs of war were loose, and was champing the bit like a war-horse. Lady Ascot was as nervous as Mary, dying to say something, but unable. Lady Hainault was calmly inexorable, Adelaide sublimely indifferent. If you will also consider that Lady Ascot was awaiting news of Charles—nay, possibly Charles himself—and that, in asking Adelaide to lunch, she had overlooked the probability that William would bring him back with him—that Lord Welter had come without invitation, and that the Hainaults were totally unexpected—you will think that the dear old lady was in about as uncomfortable a position as she could be, and that any event, even the house catching fire, must change matters for the better.

Not at all. They say that, when things come to the worst, they must mend. That is undeniable. But when are they at the worst? Who can tell that? Lady Ascot thought they were at the worst now, and was taking comfort. And then the footman threw open the door, and announced—

"Lady Hainault and Miss Hicks."

At this point Lady Ascot lost her temper, and exclaimed aloud, "This is too much!" They thought old Lady Hainault did not hear her; but she did, and so did Hicks. They heard it fast enough, and remembered it too.

In great social catastrophes, minor differences are forgotten. In the Indian mutiny, people spoke to one

another, and made friends, who were at bitterest variance before. There are crises so terrible that people of all creeds and shades of political opinion must combine against a common enemy. This was one. When this dreadful old woman made her totally unexpected entrance, and when Lady Ascot showed herself so entirely without discretion as to exclaim aloud in the way she did, young Lady Hainault and Adelaide were so horrified, so suddenly quickened to a sense of impending danger, that they began talking loudly and somewhat affectionately to one another. And young Lady Hainault, whose self-possession was scattered to the four winds by this last misfortune, began asking Adelaide all about Lady Brittlejug's drum, in full hearing of her mamma-in-law, who treasured up every word she said. And, just as she became conscious of saying wildly that she was so sorry she could not have been there—as if Lady Brittlejug would ever have had the impudence to ask her—she saw Lord Saltire, across the room, looking quietly at her, with the expression on his face of one of the idols at Abou Simbel.

Turn Lady Ascot once fairly to bay, you would (if you can forgive slang) get very little change out of her. She came of valiant blood. No Headstall was ever yet known to refuse his fence. Even her poor brother, showing as he did traces of worn-out blood (the men always go a generation or two before the women), had been a desperate rider, offered to kick Fouquier Tinville at his trial, and had kept Simon waiting on the guillo-

tine while he pared his nails. Her ladyship rose and accepted battle; she advanced towards old Lady Hainault, and, leaning on her crutched stick, began—

"And how do you do, my dear Lady Hainault?"

She thought Lady Hainault would say something very disagreeable, as she usually did. She looked at her, and was surprised to see how altered she was. There was something about her looks that Lady Ascot did not like.

"My dear Lady Ascot," said old Lady Hainault, "I thank you. I am a very old woman. I never forget my friends, I assure you. Hicks, is Lord Hainault here?—I am very blind, you will be glad to hear, Lady Ascot. Hicks, I want Lord Hainault instantly. Fetch him to me, you stupid woman. Hainault! Hainault!"

Our Lady Hainault rose suddenly, and put her arm round her waist. "Mamma," she said, "what do you want?"

"I want Hainault, you foolish girl. Is that him? Hainault, I have made the will, my dear boy. The rogue came to me, and I told him that the will was made, and that Britten and Sloane had witnessed it. Did I do right or not, eh? Ha! ha! I followed you here to tell you. Don't let that woman Ascot insult me, Hainault. She has committed a felony, that woman. I'll have her prosecuted. And all to get that chit Alicia married to that pale-faced papist, Petre Ravenshoe. She thinks I didn't know it, does she? I knew she knew it well enough, and I knew it too, and I have

committed a felony too, in holding my tongue, and we'll both go to Bridewell, and—"

Lord Saltire here came up, and quietly offered her his arm. She took it and departed, muttering to herself.

I must mention here, that the circumstance mentioned by old Lady Hainault, of having made a will, has nothing to do with the story. A will had existed to the detriment of Lady Hainault and Miss Hicks, and she had most honourably made another in their favour.

Lady Ascot would have given worlds to unsay many things she had heretofore said to her. It was evident that poor old Lady Hainault's mind was failing. Lady Ascot would have prayed her forgiveness on her knees, but it was too late. Lady Hainault never appeared in public again. She died a short time after this, and, as I mentioned before, left poor Miss Hicks a rich woman. Very few people knew how much good there was in the poor old soul. Let the Casterton tenantry testify.

On this occasion her appearance had, as we have seen, the effect of reconciling Lady Hainault and Adelaide. A very few minutes after her departure William entered the room, followed by Hornby, whom none of them had ever seen before.

They saw from William's face that something fresh was the matter. He introduced Hornby, who seemed concerned, and then gave an open note to Lord Saltire. He read it over, and then said—

"This unhappy boy has disappeared again. Apparently his interview with you determined him, my dear

Lady Welter. Can you give us any clue? This is his letter:"—

"DEAR LIEUTENANT,—I must say good-bye even to you, my last friend. I was recognised in your service to-day by Lady Welter, and it will not do for me to stay in it any longer. It was a piece of madness ever taking to such a line of life."

[Here there were three lines carefully erased. Lord Saltire mentioned it, and Hornby quietly said, "I erased those lines previous to showing the letter to any one; they referred to exceedingly private matters." Lord Saltire bowed, and continued,]

"A hundred thanks for your kindness; you have been to me more like a brother than a master. We shall meet again, when you little expect it. Pray don't assist in any search after me; it will be quite useless.

"CHARLES HORTON."

Adelaide came forward as pale as death. "I believe I am the cause of this. I did not dream it would have made him alter his resolution so suddenly. When I saw him yesterday he was in a groom's livery. I told him he was disgracing himself, and told him, if he was desperate to go to the war."

They looked at one another in silence.

"Then," Lady Ascot said, "he has enlisted, I suppose. I wonder in what regiment?—could it be in yours, Mr. Hornby?"

"The very last in which he would, I should say," said Hornby, "if he wants to conceal himself. He must know that I should find him at once."

So Lady Ascot was greatly pooh-poohed by the other wiseacres, she being right all the time.

"I think," said Lord Saltire to Lady Ascot, "that perhaps we had better take Mr. Hornby into our confidence." She agreed, and, after the Hainaults and Welters were gone, Hornby remained behind with them, and heard things which rather surprised him.

"Inquiries at the depôts of various regiments would be as good a plan as any. Meanwhile I will give any assistance in my power. Pray, would it not be a good plan to advertise for him, and state all the circumstances of the case?"

"Why, no," said Lord Saltire, "we do not wish to make known all the circumstances yet. Other interests have to be consulted, and our information is not yet complete. Complete! we have nothing to go on but mere surmise."

"You will think me inquisitive," said Hornby. "But you little know what a right (I had almost said) I have to ask these questions. Does the present Mr. Ravenshoe know of all this?"

"Not one word."

And so Hornby departed with William, and said nothing at all about Ellen. As they left the door a little shoe-black looked inquisitively at them, and seemed as though he would speak. They did not notice

the child. He could have told them what they wanted to know, but how were they to guess that?

Impossible. Actually, according to the sagacious Welter, half a million pounds, and other things, going a-begging, and a dirty little shoe-black the only human being who knew where the heir was! A pig is an an obstinate animal, likewise a sheep; but what pig or sheep was ever so provoking in its obstinacy as Charles in his good-natured, well-meaning, blundering stupidity? In a very short time you will read an advertisement put into the *Times* by Lady Ascot's solicitor, which will show you the reason for some of the great anxiety which she and others felt to have him on the spot. At first Lady Ascot and Lord Saltire lamented his absence, from the hearty goodwill they bore him; but, as time wore on, they began to get deeply solicitous for his return for other reasons. Lady Ascot's hands were tied. She was in a quandary, and, when the intelligence came of his having enlisted, and there seemed nearly a certainty of his being shipped off to foreign parts, and killed before she could get at him, she was in a still greater quandary. Suppose, before being killed, he was to marry some one? "Good heavens, my dear James, was ever an unfortunate wretch punished so before for keeping a secret?"

"I should say not, Maria," said Lord Saltire coolly. "I declare I love the lad better the more trouble he gives one. There never was such a dear obstinate dog. Welter has been making his court, and has made it well

—with an air of ruffian-like simplicity, which was charming, because novel. I, even I, can hardly tell whether it was real or not. He has ten times the brains of his shallow-pated little wife, whose manœuvres, my dear Maria, I should have thought even you, not ordinarily a sagacious person, might have seen through."

"I believe the girl loves me; and don't be rude, James."

"I believe she don't care twopence for you; and I shall be as rude as I please, Maria."

Poor Lord Ascot had a laugh at this little battle between his mother and her old friend. So Lord Saltire turned to him and said—

"At half-past one to-morrow morning, you will be awakened by three ruffians in crape masks, with pistols, who will take you out of bed with horrid threats, and walk you upstairs and down in your shirt, until you have placed all your money and valuables into their hands. They will effect an entrance by removing a pane of glass, and introducing a small boy, disguised as a shoe-black, who will give them admittance."

"Good Gad!" said Lord Ascot, "what are you talking about?"

"Don't you see that shoe-black over the way?" said Lord Saltire. "He has been watching the house through two hours; the burglars are going to put him in at the back-kitchen window. There comes Daventry back from the police-station. I bet you a sovereign he has his boots cleaned."

Poor Lord Ascot jumped at the bet like an old war-horse. "I'd have given you three to one if you had waited."

Lord Daventry had indeed reappeared on the scene; his sole attendant was one of the little girls with a big bonnet and a baby, before mentioned, who had evidently followed him to the police-station, watched him in, and then accompanied him home—staring at him as at a man of dark experiences, a man not to be lost sight of on any account, lest some new and exciting thing should befall him meanwhile. This young lady, having absented herself some two hours on this errand, and having thereby deprived the baby of its natural nourishment, was now suddenly encountered by an angry mother, and, knowing what she had to expect, was forced to "dodge" her infuriated parent round and round Lord Daventry, in a way which made that venerable nobleman giddy, and caused him to stop, shut his eyes, and feebly offer them money not to do it any more. Ultimately the young lady was caught and cuffed, the baby was refreshed, and his lordship free.

Lord Saltire won his pound, to his great delight. Such an event as a shoe-black in South Audley Street was not to be passed by. Lord Daventry entered into conversation with our little friend, asked him if he went to school? if he could say the Lord's Prayer? how much he made in the day? whether his parents were alive? and ultimately had his boots cleaned, and gave

the boy half-a-crown. After which he disappeared from the scene, and, like many of our large staff of supernumeraries, from this history for evermore—he has served his turn with us. Let us dismiss the kind-hearted old dandy, with our best wishes.

Lord Saltire saw him give the boy the half-crown. He saw the boy pocket it as though it were a halfpenny; and afterwards continue to watch the house, as before. He was more sure than ever that the boy meant no good. If he had known that he was waiting for one chance of seeing Charles again, perhaps he would have given him half-a-crown himself. What a difference one word from that boy would have made in our story!

When they came back from dinner, there was the boy still lying on the pavement, leaning against his box. The little girl who had had her ears boxed came and talked to him for a time, and went on. After a time she came back with a quartern loaf in her hand, the crumbs of which she picked as she went along, after the manner of children sent on an errand to the baker's. When she had gone by, he rose and leant against the railings, as though lingering, loth to go.

Once more, later, Lord Saltire looked out, and the boy was still there. "I wonder what the poor little rogue wants?" said Lord Saltire; "I have half a mind to go and ask him." But he did not. It was not to be, my lord. You might have been with Charles the next morning at Windsor. You might have been in time if you had; you will have a different sort of meeting with

him than that, if you meet him at all. Beyond the grave, my lord, that meeting must be. Possibly a happier one, who knows? who dare say?

The summer night closed in, but the boy lingered yet, to see, if perchance he might, the only friend he ever had; to hear, if he might, the only voice which had ever spoken gently and kindly to him of higher things: the only voice which had told him that strange, wild tale, scarce believed as yet, of a glorious immortality.

The streets began to get empty. The people passed him—

> "Ones and twos,
> And groups; the latest said the night grew chill,
> And hastened; but he loitered; whilst the dews
> Fell fast, he loitered still."

CHAPTER XXI.

LADY HAINAULT'S BLOTTING-BOOK.

In the natural course of events, I ought now to follow Charles in his military career, step by step. But the fact is that I know no more about the details of horse-soldiering than a marine, and, therefore, I cannot. It is within the bounds of possibility that the reader may congratulate himself on my ignorance, and it may also be possible that he has good reason for so doing.

Within a fortnight after Hornby's introduction to Lord Saltire and Lady Ascot, he was off with the head-quarters of his regiment to Varna. The depôt was at Windsor, and there, unknown to Hornby, was Charles, drilling and drilling. Two more troops were to follow the head-quarters in a short time, and so well had Charles stuck to his duty that he was considered fit to take his place in one of them. Before his moustaches were properly grown, he found himself a soldier in good earnest.

In all his troubles this was the happiest time he had, for he had got rid of the feeling that he was a disgraced man. If he must wear a livery, he would wear the Queen's; there was no disgrace in that. He was a soldier, and he would be a hero. Sometimes, perhaps,

he thought for a moment that he, with his two thousand pounds worth of education, might have been better employed than in littering a horse, and swash-bucklering about among the Windsor taverns; but he did not think long about it. If there were any disgrace in the matter, there was a time coming soon, by all accounts, when the disgrace would be wiped out in fire and blood. On Sunday, when he saw the Eton lads streaming up to the terrace, the old Shrewsbury days, and the past generally, used to come back to him rather unpleasantly; but the bugle put it all out of his head again in a moment. Were there not the three most famous armies in the world gathering, gathering, for a feast of ravens? Was not the world looking on in silence and awe, to see England, France, and Russia locked in a death-grip? Was not he to make one at the merry meeting? Who could think at such a time as this?

The time was getting short now. In five days they were to start for Southampton, to follow the head-quarters to Constantinople, to Varna, and so into the dark thunder-cloud beyond. He felt as certain that he would never come back again, as that the sun would rise on the morrow.

He made the last energetic effort that he made at all. It was like the last struggle of a drowning man. He says that the way it happened was this. And I believe him, for it was one of his own mad impulses, and, like all his other impulses, it came too late. They came branking into some pot-house, half a dozen of them, and talked

loud about this and that, and one young lad among them said, that "he would give a thousand pounds, if he had it, to see his sister before he went away, for fear she should think that he had gone off without thinking of her."

Charles left them, and walked up the street. As he walked, his purpose grew. He went straight to the quarters of a certain cornet, son to the major of the regiment, and asked to speak to him.

The cornet, a quiet, smooth-faced boy, listened patiently to what he had to say, but shook his head and told him he feared it was impossible. But, he said, after a pause, he would help him all he could. The next morning he took him to the major while he was alone at breakfast, and Charles laid his case before him so well, that the kind old man gave him leave to go to London at four o'clock, and come back by the last train that same evening.

The Duchess of Cheshire's ball was the last and greatest which was given that season. It was, they say, in some sort like the Duchess of Richmond's ball before Waterloo. The story I have heard is that Lord George Barty persuaded his mother to give it, because he was sure that it would be the last ball he should ever dance at. At all events the ball was given, and he was right; for he sailed in the same ship with Charles four days after, and was killed at Balaclava. However, we have nothing to do with that. All we have to do with is the fact, that it was a very great ball indeed, and that Lady Hainault was going to it.

Some traditions and customs grow by degrees into laws, ay, and into laws less frequently broken than those made and provided by Parliament. Allow people to walk across the corner of one of your fields for twenty years, and there is a right of way, and they may walk across that field till the crack of doom. Allow a man to build a hut on your property, and live in it for twenty years, and you can't get rid of him. He gains a right there. (I never was annoyed in either of these ways myself, for reasons which I decline to mention; but it is the law, I believe.) There is no law to make the young men fire off guns at one's gate on the 5th of November, but they never miss doing it. (I found some of the men using their rifles for this purpose last year, and had to fulminate about it.) To follow out the argument, there was no rule in Lord Hainault's house that the children should always come in and see their aunt dress for a ball. But they always did; and Lady Hainault herself, though she could be perfectly determined, never dared to question their right.

They behaved very well. Flora brought in a broken picture-broom, which, stuck into an old straw hat of Archy's, served her for feathers. She also made unto herself a newspaper fan. Gus had an old twelfth-cake ornament on his breast for a star, and a tape round his neck for a garter. In this guise they represented the Duke and Duchess of Cheshire, and received their company in a corner, as good as gold. As for Archy, he nursed his cat, sucked his thumb, and looked at his aunt.

Mary was "by way of" helping Lady Hainault's maid, but she was very clumsy about it, and her hands shook a good deal. Lady Hainault, at last looking up, saw that she was deadly pale, and crying. So, instead of taking any notice, she dismissed the children as soon as she could, as a first step towards being left alone with Mary.

Gus and Flora, finding that they must go, changed the game, and made believe that they were at court, and that their aunt was the Queen. So they dexterously backed to the door and bowed themselves out. Archy was lord chamberlain, or gold stick, or what not, and had to follow them in the same way. He was less successful, for he had to walk backwards, sucking his thumb, and nursing his cat upside down (she was a patient cat, and was as much accustomed to be nursed that way as any other). He got on very well till he came to the door, when he fell on the back of his head, crushing his cat and biting his thumb to the bone. Gus and Flora picked him up, saying that lord chamberlains never cried when they fell on the backs of their heads. But Archy, poor dear, was obliged to cry a little, the more so as the dear cat had bolted upstairs, with her tail as big as a fox's, and Archy was afraid she was angry with him, which seemed quite possible. So Mary had to go out and take him to the nursery. He would stop his crying, he said, if she would tell him the story of Ivedy Avedy. So she told it him quite to the end, where the baffled old sorcerer, Gongolo, gets into the plate-warmer

with his three farthings and the brass soup-ladle, shuts the door after him, and disappears for ever. After which she went down to Lady Hainault's room again.

Lady Hainault was alone now. She was sitting before her dressing-table, with her hands folded, apparently looking at herself in the glass. She took no notice of what she had seen; though, now they were alone together, she determined that Mary should tell her what was the matter—for, in truth, she was very anxious to know. She never looked at Mary when she came in; she only said—

"Mary, my love, how do I look?"

"I never saw you look so beautiful before," said Mary.

"I am glad of that. Hainault is so ridiculously proud of me, that I really delight in looking my best. Now, Mary, let me have the necklace; that is all, I believe, unless you would like me to put on a little rouge."

Mary tried to laugh, but could not. Her hands were shaking so that the jewels were clicking together as she held them. Lady Hainault saw that she must help her to speak, but she had no occasion; the necklace helped her.

It was a very singular necklace, a Hainault heirloom, which Lady Hainault always wore on grand occasions to please her husband. There was no other necklace like it anywhere, though some folks who did not own it said it was old-fashioned, and should be reset. It was a collar of nine points, the ends of brilliants, running

upwards as the points broadened into larger rose diamonds. The eye, catching the end of the points, was dazzled with yellow light, which faded into red as the rays of the larger roses overpowered the brilliants: and at the upper rim the soft crimson haze of light melted, overpowered, into nine blazing great rubies. It seemed, however, a shame to hide such a beautiful neck by such a glorious bauble.

Mary was trying to clasp it on, but her fingers failed, and down went the jewels clashing on the floor. The next moment she was down too, on her knees, clutching Lady Hainault's hand, and saying, or trying to say, in spite of a passionate burst of sobbing, "Lady Hainault, let me see him; let me see him, or I shall die."

Lady Hainault turned suddenly upon her, and laid her disengaged hand upon her hair. "My little darling," she said, "my pretty little bird."

"You must let me see him. You could not be so cruel. I always loved him, not like a sister, oh! not like a sister, woe to me. As you love Lord Hainault; I know it now."

"My poor little Mary. I always thought something of this kind."

"He is coming to-night. He sails to-morrow or next day, and I shall never see him again."

"Sails! where for?"

"I don't know; he does not say. But you must let me see him. He don't dream I care for him, Lady Hainault. But I must see him, or I shall die."

"You shall see him; but who is it? Any one I know?"

"Who is it? Who could it be but Charles Ravenshoe?"

"Good God! Coming here to-night! Mary, ring the bell for Alwright. Send round to South Audley Street for Lord Saltire, or William Ravenshoe, or some of them. They are dying to catch him. There is something more in their eagerness than you or I know of. Send at once, Mary, or we shall be too late. When does he come? Get up, my dear. My poor little Mary. I am so sorry. Is he coming here? And how soon will he come, dear? Do be calm. Think what we may do for him. He should be here now. Stay, I will write a note—just one line. Where is my blotting-book? Alwright, get my blotting-book. And stay; say that, if any one calls for Miss Corby, he is to be shown into the drawing-room at once. Let us go there, Mary."

Alwright had meanwhile, not having heard the last sentence, departed to the drawing-room, and possessed herself of Lady Hainault's portfolio, meaning to carry it up to the dressing-room; then she had remembered the message about any one calling being shown up to the drawing-room, and had gandered down to the hall to give it to the porter; after which she gandered upstairs to the dressing-room again, thinking that Lady Hainault was there, and missing both her and Mary from having gone downstairs. So, while she and Mary were looking for the blotting-book impatiently in the

drawing-room, the door was opened, and the servant announced, "A gentleman to see Miss Corby."

He had discreetly said a gentleman, for he did not like to say an Hussar. Mary turned round and saw a man all scarlet and gold before her, and was frightened and did not know him. But when he said, "Mary," in the old, old voice, there came such a rush of bygone times, bygone words, scenes, sounds, meetings and partings, sorrows and joys, into her wild, warm little heart, that, with a low, loving, tender cry, she ran to him and hid her face on his bosom.[1]

And Lady Hainault swept out of the room after that unlucky blotting-book. And I intend to go after her, out of mere politeness, to help her to find it. I will not submit to be lectured for making an aposiopesis. If any think they could do this business better than I, let them communicate with the publishers, and finish the story for themselves. I decline to go into that drawing-room at present. I shall wander upstairs into my lady's chamber, after that goosey-gander Alwright, and see what she has done with the blotting-book.

Lady Hainault found the idiot of a woman in her dressing-room, looking at herself in the glass, with the blotting-book under her arm. The maid looked as

[1] As a matter of curiosity I tried to write this paragraph from the word "Mary," to the word "bosom," without using a single word derived from the Latin. After having taken all possible pains to do so, I found there were eight out of forty-eight. I think it is hardly possible to reduce the proportion lower, and I think it is undesirable to reduce it so low.

foolish as people generally do who are caught looking at themselves in the glass. (How disconcerting it is to be found standing on a chair before the chimney-glass, just to have a look at your entire figure before going to a party!)[1] But Lady Hainault said nothing to her; but, taking the book from under her arm, she sat down and fiercely scrawled off a note to Lord Saltire, to be opened by any of them, to say that Charles Ravenshoe was then in her house, and to come in God's name.

"I have caged their bird for them," she said out loud when she had just finished and was folding up the letter; "they will owe me a good turn for this."

The maid, who had no notion anything was the matter, had been surreptitiously looking in the glass again, and wondering whether her nose was really so very red after all. When Lady Hainault spoke thus aloud to herself, she gave a guilty start, and said, "Immediately, my lady," which you will perceive was not exactly appropriate to the occasion.

"Don't be a goose, my good old Alwright, and don't tread on my necklace, Alwright; it is close at your feet."

So it was. Lying where Mary had dropped it. Alwright thought she must have knocked it off the dressing-table; but, when Lady Hainault told her that Miss Corby had dropped it there, Alwright began to wonder why her ladyship had not thought it worth while to pick it up again.

[1] Which is a crib from Sir E. B. L. B. L.

"Put it on while I seal this letter, will you? I cannot trust you, Alwright; I must go myself." She went out of the room and quickly downstairs to the hall. All this had taken but a few minutes; she had hurried as much as was possible, but the time seems longer to us, because, following my usual plan of playing the fool on important occasions, I have been telling you about the lady-maid's nose. She went down quickly to the hall, and sent off one of the men to South Audley Street with her note, giving him orders to run all the way, and personally to see Lady Ascot, or some one else of those named. After this she came upstairs again.

When she came to the drawing-room door, Charles was standing at it. "Lady Hainault," he said, "would you come here, please? Poor Mary has fainted."

"Poor thing," said Lady Hainault. "I will come to her. One word, Mr. Ravenshoe. Oh, do think one instant of this fatal, miserable resolution of yours. Think how fond we have all been of you. Think of the love that your cousin and Lady Ascot bear for you, and communicate with them. At all events stay ten minutes more, and see one of them. I must go to poor Mary."

"Dear Lady Hainault, you will not change my resolution to stand alone. There is a source of disgrace you probably know nothing of. Besides, nothing short of an Order in Council could stop me now. We sail for the East in twenty-four hours."

They had just time for this, very hurriedly spoken,

for poor little Mary had done what she never had done before in her life, fainted away. Lady Hainault and Charles went into the drawing-room.

Just before this, Alwright, coming downstairs, had seen her most sacred mistress standing at the drawing-room door, talking familiarly and earnestly to a common soldier. Her ladyship had taken his hand in hers, and was laying her other hand upon his breast. Alwright sat down on the stairs.

She was a poor feeble thing, and it was too much for her. She was Casterton-bred, and had a feeling for the honour of the family. Her first impulse was to run to Lord Hainault's dressing-room door and lock him in. Her next was to rock herself to and fro and moan. She followed the latter of these two impulses. Meanwhile, Lady Hainault had succeeded in bringing poor Mary to herself. Charles had seen her bending over the poor little lifeless body, and blessed her. Presently Lady Hainault said, "She is better now, Mr. Ravenshoe, will you come and speak to her?" There was no answer. Lady Hainault thought Charles was in the little drawing-room, and had not heard her. She went there. It was dimly lighted, but she saw in a moment that it was empty. She grew frightened, and hurriedly went out on to the stairs. There was no one there. She hurried down, and was met by the weeping Alwright.

"He is safe out of the house, my lady," said that brilliant genius. "I saw him come out of the drawing-

room, and I ran down and sent the hall porter on a message, and let him out myself. Oh! my lady! my lady!"

Lady Hainault was a perfect-tempered woman, but she could not stand this. "Alwright," she said, "you are a perfect, hopeless, imbecile idiot. Go and tell his lordship to come to me instantly. Instantly! do you hear? I wouldn't," she continued to herself when Alwright was gone, "face Lord Saltire alone after this for a thousand pounds."

What was the result of Charles's interview with Mary? Simply this. The poor little thing had innocently shown him, in a way he could not mistake, that she loved him with all her heart and soul. And, when he left that room, he had sworn an oath to himself that he would use all his ingenuity to prevent her ever setting eyes on him again. "I am low and degraded enough now," he said to himself; "but if I gave that poor innocent child the opportunity of nourishing her love for me, I should be too low to live."

He did not contemplate the possibility, you see, of raising himself to her level. No. He was too much broken down for that. Hope was dead with him. He had always been a man of less than average strength of will; and two or three disasters—terrible disasters they were, remember—had made him such as we see him, a helpless, drifting log upon the sea of chance. What Lord Welter had said was terribly true, "Charles Ravenshoe is broken-hearted." But to the very last he

was a just, honourable, true, kind-hearted man. A man in ten thousand. Call him fool, if you will. I cannot gainsay you there. But when you have said that, you have finished.

Did he love Mary? Yes, from this time forward, he loved her as she loved him; and, the darker the night grew, that star burned steadily and more steadily yet. Never brighter, perhaps, than when it gleamed on the turbid waters, which whelm the bodies of those to whose eyesight all stars have set for ever.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH CUTHBERT BEGINS TO SEE THINGS IN A NEW LIGHT.

THE stream at Ravenshoe was as low as they had ever seen it, said the keeper's boys who were allowed to take artists and strangers up to see the waterfall in the wood. The artists said that it was more beautiful than ever; for now, instead of roaring headlong over the rocks in one great sheet beneath the quivering oak leaves, it streamed and spouted over and among the black slabs of slate in a million interlacing jets. Yes, the artists were quite satisfied with the state of things; but the few happy souls who had dared to ask Cuthbert for a day or so of salmon-fishing were not so well satisfied by any means. While the artists were saying that this sort of thing, you know, was the sort of thing to show one how true it was that beauty, life, and art, were terms co-ordinate, synonymous, inseparable—that these made up the sum of existence—that the end of existence was love, and what was love but the worship of the beautiful (or something of this sort, for your artist is but a mortal man, like the rest of us, and is apt, if you give him plenty of tobacco on a hot day, to get uncommon hazy in his talk)—while, I say, the artists were

working away like mad, and uttering the most beautiful sentiments in the world, the anglers were, as old Master Lee, up to Slarrow, would have said, "dratting" the scenery, the water, the weather, the beer, and existence generally, because it wouldn't rain. If it had rained, you see, the artists would have left talking about the beautiful, and begun "dratting" in turn; leaving the anglers to talk about the beautiful as best they might. Which fact gives rise to moral reflections of the profoundest sort. But every one, except the discontented anglers, would have said that it was heavenly summer weather. The hay was all got in without one drop of rain on it. And now, as one glorious, cloudless day succeeded another, all the land seemed silently swelling with the wealth of the harvest. Fed by gentle dews at night, warmed by the genial sun by day, the corn began to turn from grey to gold, and the distant valleys which spread away inland, folded in the mighty grey arms of the moor, shone out gallantly with acre beyond acre of yellow wheat and barley. A still, happy time.

And the sea! Who shall tell the beauty of the restless Atlantic in such weather? For nearly three weeks there was a gentle wind, now here, now there, which just curled the water, and made a purple shadow for such light clouds as crept across the blue sky above. Night and morning the fishing-boats crept out and in. Never was such a fishing season. The mouth of the stream was crowded with salmon, waiting to get up the first fresh. You might see them as you sailed across

the shallow sand-bank, the Delta of the stream, which had never risen above the water for forty years, yet which now, so still had been the bay for three weeks, was within a foot of the surface at low tide.

A quiet, happy time. The three old Master Lees lay all day on the sand, where the fishing-boats were drawn up, and had their meals brought to them by young male relatives, who immediately pulled off every rag of clothes they had, and went into the water for an hour or two. The minding of these 'ere clothes, and the looking out to sea, was quite enough employment for these three old cronies. They never fell out once for three weeks. They used to talk about the war, or the cholera, which was said to be here, or there, or coming, or gone. But they cared little about that. Ravenshoe was not a cholera place. It had never come there before, and they did not think that it was coming now. They were quite right; it never came. Cuthbert used his influence, and got the folks to move some cabbage stalks, and rotten fish, just to make sure, as he said. They would have done more for him than that just now; so it was soon accomplished. The juvenile population, which is the pretty way of saying the children, might have offered considerable opposition to certain articles of merchandise being removed without due leave obtained and given; but, when it was done, they were all in the water as naked as they were born. When it was over they had good sense enough to see that it could not be helped. These sweeping measures

of reform, however, are apt to bear hard on particular cases. For instance, young James Lee, great-grandson of Master James Lee, up to Slarrow, lost six dozen (some say nine, but that I don't believe) of oyster shells, which he was storing up for a grotto. Cuthbert very properly refunded the price of them, which amounted to two-pence.

"Nonsense, again," you say. Why, no! What I have written above is not nonsense. The whims and oddities of a village; which one has seen with one's own eyes, and heard with one's own ears, are not nonsense. I knew, when I began, what I had to say in this chapter, and I have just followed on a train of images. And the more readily, because I know that what I have to say in this chapter must be said without effort to be said well.

If I thought I was writing for a reader who was going to criticise closely my way of telling my story, I tell you the honest truth, I should tell my story very poorly indeed. Of course I must submit to the same criticism as my betters. But there are times when I feel that I must have my reader go hand in hand with me. To do so, he must follow the same train of ideas as I do. At such times I write as naturally as I can. I see that greater men than I have done the same. I see that Captain Marryat, for instance, at a particular part of his noblest novel, "The King's Own," has put in a chapter about his grandmother and the spring tides, which, for perfect English and rough humour, it is hard to match anywhere.

I have not dared to play the fool, as he has, for two reasons. The first, that I could not play it so well, and the second, that I have no frightful tragedy to put before you, to counterbalance it, as he had. Well, it is time that this rambling came to an end. I hope that I have not rambled too far, and bored you. That would be very unfortunate just now.

Ravenshoe bay again, then—in the pleasant summer drought I have been speaking of before. Father Mackworth and the two Tiernays were lying on the sand, looking to sea. Cuthbert had gone off to send away some boys who were bathing too near the mouth of the stream and hunting his precious salmon. The younger Tiernay had recently taken to collect "common objects of the shore"—a pleasant, healthy mania which prevailed about that time. He had been dabbling among the rocks at the western end of the bay, and had just joined his brother and Father Mackworth with a tin-box full of all sorts of creatures, and he turned them out on the sand and called their attention to them.

"A very good morning's work, my brother," he said. "These anemones are all good and rare ones."

"Bedad," said the jolly priest, "they'd need be of some value, for they ain't pretty to look at; what's this cockle now wid the long red spike coming out of him?"

"Cardium tuberculatum."

"See here, Mackworth," said Tiernay, rolling over toward him on the sand with the shell in his hand.

"Here's the rid-nosed oysther of Carlingford. Ye remember the legend about it, surely?"

"I don't, indeed," said Mackworth, angrily, pretty sure that Father Tiernay was going to talk nonsense, but not exactly knowing how to stop him.

"Not know the legend!" said Father Tiernay. "Why, when Saint Bridget was hurrying across the sand, to attend Saint Patrick in his last illness, poor dear, this divvle of a oysther was sunning himself on the shore, and, as she went by, he winked at her holiness with the wicked eye of 'um, and he says, says he, 'Nate ankles enough, anyhow,' he says. 'Ye're drunk ye spalpeen,' says St. Bridget, 'to talk like that at an honest gentlewoman.' 'Sorra a bit of me,' says the oysther. 'Ye're always drunk,' says St. Bridget. 'Drunk yourself,' says the oysther; 'I'm fastin from licker since the tide went down.' 'What makes yer nose so red, ye scoundrel?" says St. Bridget: 'No ridder nor yer own,' says the oysther, getting angry. For the Saint was stricken in years, and red-nosed by rayson of being out in all weathers, seeing to this and to that. 'Yer nose is red through drink,' says she, 'and yer nose shall stay as rid as mine is now, till the day of judgment.' And that's the legend about St. Bridget and the Carlingford oysther, and ye ought to be ashamed that ye never heard it before."

"I wish, sir," said Mackworth, "that you could possibly stop yourself from talking this preposterous, indecent nonsense. Surely the first and noblest of

Irish Saints may claim exemption from your clumsy wit."

"Begorra, I'm catching it, Mr. Ravenshoe," said Tiernay.

"What for?" said Cuthbert, who had just come up.

"Why, for telling a legend. Sure, I made it up on the spot. But it is none the worse for that; d'ye think so now?"

"Not much the better, I should think," said Cuthbert, laughing.

"Allow me to say," said Mackworth, "that I never heard such shameless, blasphemous nonsense in my life."

The younger Tiernay was frightened, and began gathering up his shells and weeds. His handsome weak face was turned towards the great, strong, coarse face of his brother, with a look of terror, and his fingers trembled as he put the sea-spoils into his box. Cuthbert, watching them both, guessed that sometimes Father Tiernay could show a violent, headlong temper, and that his brother had seen an outbreak of this kind and trembled for one now. It was only a guess, possibly a good one; but there were no signs of such an outbreak now. Father Tiernay only lay back on the sand and laughed, without a cloud on his face.

"Bedad," he said, "I've been lying on the sand, and the sun has got into my stomach and made me talk nonsense. When I was a gossoon, I used to sleep with the pig; and it was a poor feeble-minded pig, as never

got fat on petaty skins. If folly's catchin', I must have caught it from that pig. Did ye ever hear the legend of St. Laurence O'Toole's wooden-legged sow, Mackworth?"

It was evident, after this, that the more Mackworth fulminated against good Father Tiernay's unutterable nonsense, the more he would talk; so he rose and moved sulkily away. Cuthbert asked him, laughing, what the story was.

"Faix," said Tiernay, "I ain't sure, principally because I havn't had time to invent it; but we've got rid of Mackworth, and can now discourse reasonable."

Cuthbert sent a boy up to the hall for some towels, and then lay down on the sand beside Tiernay. He was very fond of that man in spite of his reckless Irish habit of talking nonsense. He was not alone there. I think that every one who knew Tiernay liked him.

They lay on the sand together, those three; and, when Father Mackworth's anger had evaporated, he came back and lay beside him. Tiernay put his hand out to him, and Mackworth shook it, and they were reconciled. I believe Mackworth esteemed Tiernay, though they were so utterly unlike in character and feeling. I know that Tiernay had a certain admiration for Mackworth.

"Do you think, now," said Tiernay, "that you Englishmen enjoy such a scene and such a time as this as much as we Irishmen do? I cannot tell. You talk

better about it. You have a dozen poets to our one. Our best poet, I take it, is Tommy Moore. You class him as third-rate; but I doubt, mind you, whether you feel nature so acutely as we do."

"I think we do," said Cuthbert, eagerly. "I cannot think that you can feel the beauty of the scene we are looking at more deeply than I do. You feel nature as in 'Silent O'Moyle;' we feel it as in Keats' 'St. Agnes' Eve.'"

He was sitting up on the sand, with his elbows on his knees, and his face buried in his hands. None of them spoke for a time; and he, looking seaward, said, idly, in a low voice—

> "'St. Agnes' Eve. Ah! bitter chill it was.
> The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
> The hare limped, trembling, through the frozen grass;
> And drowsy was the flock in woolly fold.'"

What was the poor lad thinking of? God knows. There are times when one can't follow the train of a man's thoughts—only treasure up their spoken words as priceless relics.

His beautiful face was turned towards the dying sun, and in that face there was a look of such kindly, quiet peace, that they who watched it were silent, and waited to hear what he would say.

The western headland was black before the afternoon sun, and, far to sea, Lundy lay asleep in a golden haze. All before them the summer sea heaved between the capes, and along the sand, and broke in short crisp surf

at their feet, gently moving the seaweed, the sand, and the shells.

"St. Agnes' Eve," he said again. "Ah, yes! that is one of the poems written by Protestants which help to make men Catholics. Nine-tenths of their highest religious imagery is taken from Catholicism. The English poets have nothing to supply the place of it. Milton felt it, and wrote about it; yes, after ranging through all heathendom for images, he comes home to us at last:—

> "'Let my due feet never fail
> To walk the studious cloisters pale,
> And love the high embowed roof,
> With antique pillars massy proof,
> And storied windows, richly dight,
> Casting a dim religious light.'

"Yes; he could feel for that cloister life. The highest form of human happiness! We have the poets with us, at all events. Why, what is the most perfect bijou of a poem in the English language? Tennyson's 'St. Agnes.' He had to come to us."

The poor fellow looked across the sea, which was breaking in crisp ripples at his feet among the seaweed, the sand, and the shells; and, as they listened, they heard him say, almost passionately—

> "'Break up the heavens, oh Lord! and far
> Through all yon starlight keen
> Draw me, thy bride, a glittering star
> In raiment white and clean.'

"They have taken our churches from us, and driven

us into Birmingham-built chapels. They sneer at us, but they forget that we built their arches and stained their glass for them. Art has revenged herself on them for their sacrilege by quitting earth in disgust. They have robbed us of our churches and our revenues, and turned us out on the world. Ay, but we are revenged. They don't know the use of them now they have got them; and the only men who could teach them, the Tractarians, are abused and persecuted by them for their superior knowledge."

So he rambled on, looking seaward; at his feet the surf playing with the sand, the seaweed, and the shells.

He made a very long pause, and then, when they thought that he was thinking of something quite different, he suddenly said—

"I don't believe it matters whether a man is buried in the chancel, or out of it. But they are mad to discourage such a feeling as that, and not make use of it. Am I the worse man because I fancy that, when I lie there so quiet, I shall hear above my head the footfalls of those who go to kneel around the altar? What is it one of them says—

> "'Or where the kneeling hamlet drains
> The chalice of the grapes of God.'"

He very seldom spoke so much as this. They were surprised to hear him ramble on so; but it was an afternoon in which it was natural to sit upon the shore and talk, saying straight on just what came uppermost

—a quiet, pleasant afternoon; an afternoon to lie upon the sand and conjure up old memories.

"I have been rambling, hav'n't I?" he said presently. "Have I been talking aloud, or only thinking?"

"You have been talking," said Tiernay, wondering at such a question.

"Have I? I thought I had been only thinking. I will go and bathe, I think, and clear my head from dreams. I must have been quoting poetry, then," he added, smiling.

"Ay, and quoting it well too," said Tiernay.

A young fisherman was waiting with a boat, and the lad had come with his towels. He stepped lazily across the sand to the boat, and they shoved off.

Besides the murmur of the surf upon the sand, playing with the shells and seaweed; besides the shouting of the bathing boys; besides the voices of the home-returning fishermen, carried sharp and distinct along the water; besides the gentle chafing of the stream among the pebbles, was there no other sound upon the beach that afternoon? Yes, a sound different to all these. A loud-sounding alarm drum, beating more rapidly and furiously each moment, but only heard by one man, and not heeded by him.

The tide drawing eastward, and a gentle wind following it, hardly enough to fill the sails of the lazy fishing-boats and keep them to their course. Here and there among the leeward part of the fleet, you might hear the sound of an oar working in the rowlocks,

sleepily coming over the sea and mingling harmoniously with the rest.

The young man with Cuthbert rowed out a little distance, and then they saw Cuthbert standing in the prow undressing himself. The fishing-boats near him luffed and hurriedly put out oars, to keep away. The Squire was going to bathe, and no Ravenshoe man was ill-mannered enough to come near.

Those on the shore saw him standing stripped for one moment—a tall majestic figure. Then they saw him plunge into the water and begin swimming.

And then;—it is an easy task to tell it. They saw his head go under water, and, though they started on their feet and waited till seconds grew to minutes and hope was dead, it never rose again. Without one cry, without one struggle, without even one last farewell wave of the hand, as the familiar old landscape faded on his eyes for ever, poor Cuthbert went down; to be seen no more until the sea gave up its dead. The poor wild, passionate heart had fluttered itself to rest for ever.

The surf still gently playing with the sand, the sea changing from purple to grey, and from grey to black, under the fading twilight. The tide sweeping westward towards the tall black headland, towards the slender-curved thread of the new moon, which grew more brilliant as the sun dipped to his rest in the red Atlantic.

Groups of fishermen and sea boys and servants, that followed the ebbing tide as it went westward, peering into the crisping surf to see something they knew was

there. One group that paused among the tumbled boulders on the edge of the retreating surges, under the dark promontory, and bent over something which lay at their feet.

The naked corpse of a young man, calm and beautiful in death, lying quiet and still between two rocks, softly pillowed on a bed of green and purple seaweed. And a priest that stood upon the shore, and cried wildly to the four winds of heaven, "Oh, my God, I loved him! My God! my God! I loved him!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SECOND COLUMN OF "THE TIMES" OF THIS DATE, WITH OTHER MATTERS.

"TOMATO. Slam the door!"

"EDWARD. Come at once; poor Maria is in sad distress. Toodlekins stole!!!"

"J. B. can return to his deeply afflicted family if he likes, or remain away if he likes. The A F, one and all, will view either course with supreme indifference. Should he choose the former alternative, he is requested to be as quick as possible. If the latter, to send the key of the cellaret."

"LOST. A little black and tan lady's lap dog. Its real name is Pussy, but it will answer to the name of Toodlekins best. If any gentleman, living near Kensal Green or Kentish Town, should happen, perfectly accidentally of course, to have it in his possession, and would be so good as to bring it to 997, Sloane Street, I would give him a sovereign and welcome, and not a single question asked, upon my honour."

It becomes evident to me that the dog Toodlekins, mentioned in the second advertisement, is the same dog alluded to in the fourth; unless you resort to the theory that two dogs were stolen on the same day, and that both were called Toodlekins. And you are hardly prepared to do that, I fancy. Consequently, you arrive at this, that the "Maria" of the second advertisement, is the "little black and tan lady" of the fourth. And that, in 1854, she lived at 997, Sloane Street. Who was she? Had she made a fortune by exhibiting herself in a

caravan like Mrs. Gamp's spotted negress, and taken a house in Sloane Street, for herself, Toodlekins, and the person who advertised for Edward to come and comfort her? Again, who was Edward? Was he her brother? Was he something nearer and dearer? Was he enamoured of her person or her property? I fear the latter. Who could truly love a little black and tan lady?

Again. The wording of her advertisement gives rise to this train of thought. Two persons must always be concerned in stealing a dog—the person who steals the dog, and the person who has the dog stolen; because, if the dog did not belong to any one, it is evident that no one could steal it. To put it more scientifically, there must be an active and a passive agent. Now, I'll bet a dirty old dishcloth against the *New York Herald*, which is pretty even betting, that our little black and tan friend, Maria, had been passive agent in a dog-stealing case more than once before this, or why does she mention these two localities? But we must get on to the other advertisements.

"LOST. A large white bull-dog, very red about the eyes; desperately savage. Answers to the name of 'Billy.' The advertiser begs that any person finding him will be very careful not to irritate him. The best way of securing him is to make him pin another dog, and then tie his four legs together and muzzle him. Any one bringing him to the Coach and Horses, St. Martin's Lane, will be rewarded."

He seems to have been found the same day, and by some one who was a bit of a wag; for the very next advertisement runs thus:

"FOUND. A large white bull-dog, very red about the eyes; desperately savage. The owner can have him at once, by applying to Queen's Mews, Belgrave Street, and paying the price of the advertisement and the cost of a new pad groom, aged 18, as the dog has bitten one so severely about the knee that it is necessary to sell him at once to drive a cab."

"LOST. Somewhere between Mile-end Road and Putney Bridge, an old leathern purse, containing a counterfeit sixpence, a lock of hair in a paper, and a twenty-pound note. Any one bringing the note to 267, Tylney Street, Mayfair, may keep the purse and the rest of its contents for their trouble."

This was a very shabby advertisement. The next, though coming from an attorney's office, is much more munificent. It quite makes one's mouth water, and envy the lucky fellow who would answer it.

"ONE HUNDRED GUINEAS REWARD. Register wanted. To parish clerks. Any person who can discover the register of marriage between Petre Ravenshoe, Esq. of Ravenshoe, in the county of Devon, and Maria Dawson, which is supposed to have been solemnised in or about the year 1778, will receive the above reward, on communicating with Messrs. Compton and Brogden, solicitors, 2004, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

Tomato slammed the door as he was told. Edward dashed up to 997, Sloane Street, in a hansom cab, just as the little black and tan lady paid one sovereign to a gentleman in a velveteen shooting-coat, from Kentish town, and hugged Toodlekins to her bosom. J. B. came home to his afflicted family with the key of the cellaret. The white bull-dog was restored to the prizefighter, and the groom lad received shin-plaster and was sent home tipsy. Nay, even an honest man, finding that the note was stopped, took it to Tylney Street and got a half-a-

crown. But no one ever answered the advertisement of Lord Saltire's solicitor about the marriage register. The long summer dragged on. The square grew dry and dusty; business grew slack, and the clerks grew idle; but no one came. As they sat there drinking ginger-beer, and looking out at the parched lilacs and laburnums, talking about the theatres, and the war, and the cholera, it grew to be a joke with them. When any shabby man in black was seen coming across the square, they would say to one another, "Here comes the man to answer Lord Saltire's advertisement." Many men in black, shabby and smart, came across the square and into the office; but none had a word to say about the marriage of Petre Ravenshoe with Maria Dawson, which took place in the year 1778.

Once, during that long, sad summer, the little shoeblack thought he would saunter up to the house in South Audley Street, before which he had waited so long one night to meet Charles, who had never come. Not perhaps with any hope. Only that he would like to see the place which his friend had appointed. He might come back there some day; who could tell?

Almost every house in South Audley Street had the shutters closed. When he came opposite Lord Ascot's house, he saw the shutters were closed there too. But more; at the second story there was a great painted board hung edgeways, all scarlet and gold. There was some writing on it too, on a scroll. He could spell a little now, thanks to the ragged-school, and he spelt out

"Christus Salvator meus." What could that mean? he wondered.

There was an old woman in the area, holding two of the rails in her hands, and resting her chin on the kerb-stone, looking along the hot desolate street. Our friend went over and spoke to her.

"I say, Missis," he said, "what's that thing up there?"

"That's the scutching, my man," said she.

"The scutchings!"

"Ah! My Lord's dead. Died last Friday week, and they've took him down to the country house, to bury him."

"My Lord?" said the boy; "was he the one as used to wear top-boots, and went for a soger?"

The old woman had never seen my lord wear top-boots. Had hearn tell, though, as his father used to, and drive a coach and four in 'em. None on 'em hadn't gone for sogers, neither.

"But what's the scutching for?" asked the boy.

They put it up for a year, like for a monument, she said. She couldn't say what the writing on it meant. It was my lord's motter, that was all she knowd. And, being a tender-hearted old woman, and not having the fear of thieves before her eyes, she had taken him down into the kitchen, and fed him. When he returned to the upper regions, he was "collared" by a policeman, on a charge of "area sneaking," but, after explanations, was let go, to paddle home, barefooted, to the cholera-

stricken court where he lived, little dreaming, poor lad, what an important part he was accidentally to play in this history hereafter.

They laid poor Lord Ascot to sleep in the chancel at Ranford, and Lady Ascot stood over the grave like a grey, old, storm-beaten tower. "It is strange, James," she said to Lord Saltire that day, "you and I being left like this, with the young ones going down around us like grass. Surely our summons must come soon, James. It's weary, weary waiting."

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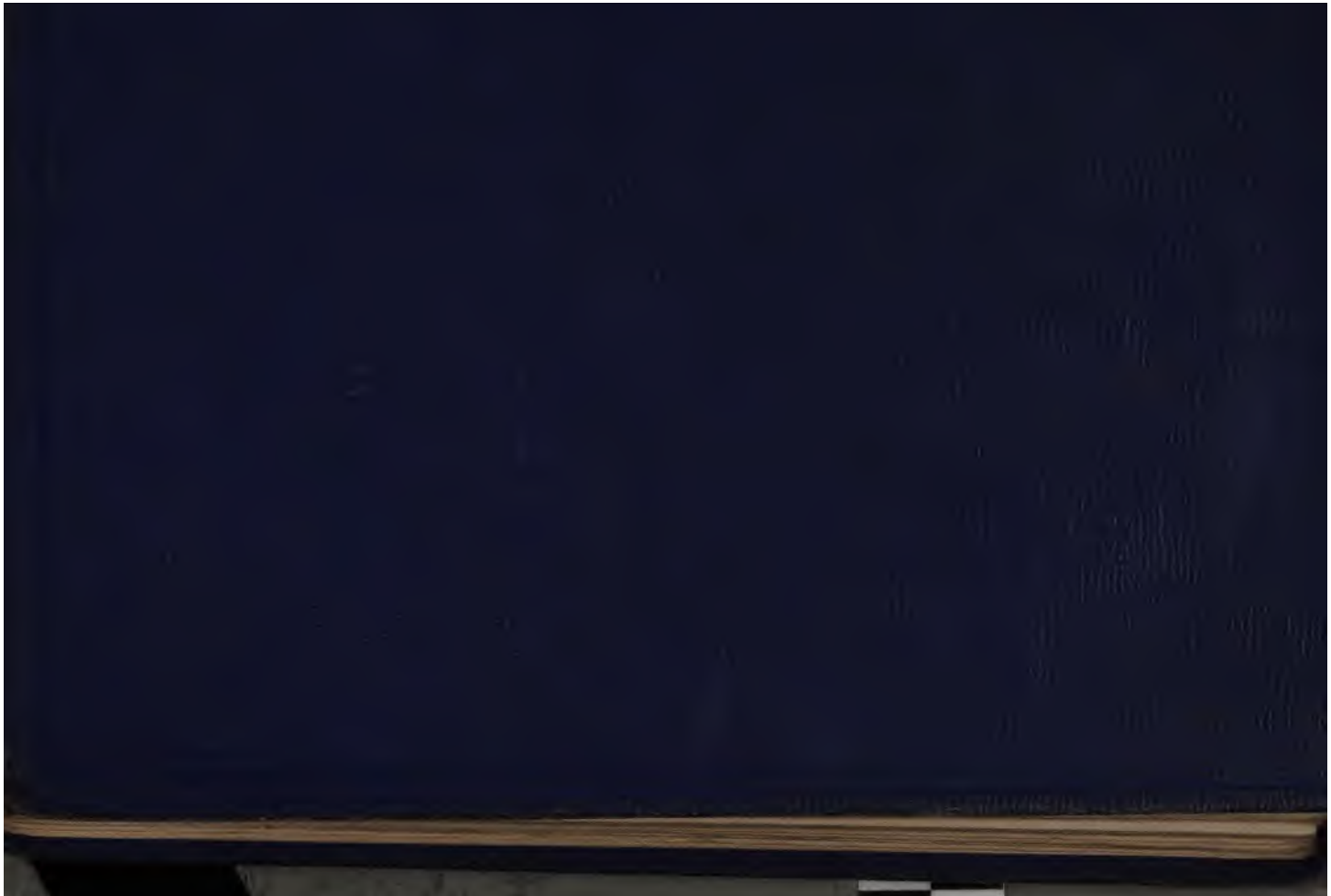
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